



# Shall I Win Her?



By James Grant

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# NOVELS AT TWO SHILLINGS.

By LORD LYTTON.

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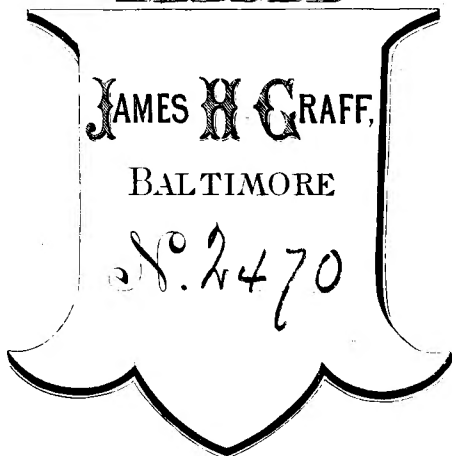
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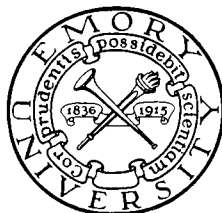
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SHALL I WIN HER?



# SHALL I WIN HER?

*The Story of a Wanderer*

By JAMES GRANT

AUTHOR OF 'THE ROMANCE OF WAR,' 'UNDER THE RED DRAGON,'  
'FAIRER THAN A FAIRY,' ETC.



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# SHALL I WIN HER

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## CHAPTER I.

"WELL, by Jove ! Dick, of all the strange adventures it has been my lot to have, this meeting with you in the bush here is certainly the strangest of all. Tell me all about it—how it has come to pass, I mean."

"It is most singular, Gerard," replied the other, with sadness in his tone, as he clasped his friend's hand for the third time ; "and there was a period when you little thought to see Dick Haddon in such a guise as this."

The speakers were Gerard Douglas, a captain of the 74th Highlanders, then proceeding with a party of that regiment towards the Amatola mountains, and myself, Richard Haddon, whilom an officer in the Queen's service, but now, by the freaks of fortune, a Caffre trader, and the scene of our sudden meeting and mutual recognition was near Hell's Kloof, on the Great Fish River—a wild spot in Southern Africa, distant about fifty miles from Algoa Bay.

The May evening was closing, but the southern sky was clear and bright. Rocky hills shut in the landscape, and in the light of the two huge watchfires—prepared by the halted Highlanders and the Hottentot helps of your humble servant, the Caffre trader—the prickly pears, the scarlet and lilac geraniums, the African aloes in full flower, were distinctly visible in the foreground; while beyond and around spread the silent

and voiceless forest and jungle, out of which there flew from time to time the bright golden spreuw, the honeybird, and the oriole, scared by our lights and voices ; while there were gloomier features to the picture, for among the millet and melons that grew wild under the pine trees the bare brown feet and muscular legs of some dead Caffres protruded, and more than one feathered assegai, or reedy lance, with its steel head stuck in the turf, just as the hands of the dead had launched it, bore evidence of a recent conflict.

Our two fires burned brightly. Near one stood my travelling waggon, seventeen feet long, covered by a tarpaulin roof, drawn by twelve tough little Faderland oxen, and attended by four Hottentots, who had all served in the Cape Mounted Rifle Corps, their attire consisting of tattered vests and pantaloons, with quaint cloth caps, and each was armed with a heavy musket and knife, and had a large powder-horn slung over his left shoulder.

Captain Douglas and his party of Highlanders were somewhat quaint in aspect too, their uniform not being precisely such as would pass muster at Aldershott or St. James's Park. Their bonnets and plaids, red coats, and other bravery, had been replaced by a costume more suitable to a warfare in the wild bush of the Cape Colony. They still retained their tartan trews, but wore under their pipeclayed cross-belts short blue blouses of canvas, with felt shoes, and pouches of untanned hide. They had forage-caps with large square leather peaks, and all were weather-beaten and service-like fellows.

Advanced sentinels had been judiciously posted by Douglas, so the rest had piled their arms, and were preparing to make a meal of the contents of their havresacks, sharing their biscuits with the captain's two horses, which were grazing near, knee-haltered—a colonial method of securing a nag when turned afield—a leather thong being attached to the neck, passed round a knee, and tied there.

Gerard Douglas, a fine-looking man of five-and-thirty, who had been almost eighteen years in the service, and was every



inch a soldier, yet not the less a thorough gentleman, surveyed me with a kind and earnest eye, which grew moist when we spoke again, for we had last met under very different circumstances.

He was a man with perfectly regular features, a straight nose, having well-curved nostrils, and keen, resolute, dark gray eyes. Like the most of his name he was dark-complexioned, and had a handsome curling brown beard, with which his moustaches mingled. He wore a kind of braided blue blouse, to assimilate his appearance with that of his men, for the Caffre marksmen were deadly shots, and when leveling their muskets from amid the dense green jungle, strove always to pick off the officers. Over this was slung his havresack and telescope, and at his waistbelt hung his basket-hilted claymore and a pair of revolver pistols.

We were somewhat similar in personal appearance and stature ; but though I was his junior by a few years, the life I had led latterly made me seem older than I was in reality.

"And you are *en route* for the Amatolas?" said I.

"Yes—following up the regiment," he replied, while stretching himself on the grass, and then thankfully taking a pull at my brandy flask. "We have been ordered to the front, against those rascally Caffres."

"But, Douglas, old fellow, this is **not** the route to the Amatolas."

"The deuce it isn't!"

"You should have marched by the Governor's Kloof towards the narrow province of Victoria. You are thirty-five miles at least to the eastward of the proper way, and your guide—"

"Was a corporal of the Cape Mounted Rifles, who bolted the moment he heard the firing of your muskets."

"He must have misled you, for there seems to be a secret understanding between that corps and some of the Caffre chiefs ; but it has proved a fortunate circumstance for me," I added, smiling, for I had just made a narrow escape.

In a deep *poort*—or glen, as we call it at home—I had been

pursued, and had to maintain a running fight for some miles with my team of oxen going at full speed, while my four Hottentots, the chief of whom was Adrian Africander, an ex-corporal of the Cape corps, kept up a fire from the rear of the waggon, and but for our coming suddenly and most opportunely upon Douglas's marching party in the bush, we should all have been slain, with every cruelty that the most artful savage nature could devise.

"I never in my life was so glad as when I saw your fellows in their crossbelts and blouses, Douglas, and when I heard your piper waking the rocky echoes of Hell's Kloof."

"Is that the name of this lively locality?"

"Yes."

"Rather appropriate, isn't it?"

"Being a southland-bred Scot, I have often laughed at the bagpipes, and thought them barbarous; but here in the dingles of the Caffre forest, while those wild devils were launching shot and assegais at us, their screeching was, by Jove! the sweetest music I ever heard."

"And you sold out of the old —th Fusiliers, Dick?"

"Yes; debts, and mishaps concerning that property out of which I was so shamefully tricked, and by which I lost something that I value more than the property by a thousand times, proved too much for me in the end."

"Yes, I know—Clarice Haywood," said he, lowering his voice.

A gesture of sorrow and impatience escaped me.

"The Fusiliers must have seen some service since I left them?" said I, after a pause, to change the subject.

"Yes; we lay with them in Cork just before we sailed. They have been changing fast."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; as the song says:

"Some have got shot, and some got drowned,  
And some, beyond the seas,  
Got scraped to death with oyster-shells,  
Among the Carribees."

"Don't jest, Gerard ; for my heart sinks when I think of our happy mess-table—of the brave and handsome young fellows I shall never see more. My life, since I left them, has been cast among deuced hard lines, I can tell you, Gerard."

"Who were those that were attacking you when we came so promptly to the rescue in extended order?"

"Caffres."

"Of course."

"A party of darkies under a savage bushranger, who is said to be a European—some say a Briton ; any way, an escaped convict, who has fraternised with the Caffres, and married at least one of their women. Oddly enough, he has acted more than once as my unrelenting enemy ; and in several of my trading expeditions tried to cut me off before the war began. He was the moving spirit this afternoon ; but I rather think I put a ball in his shoulder."

"Who is this man, Dick?"

"No one knows with certainty."

"I mean, what is his confounded name?"

"Mark Graaf."

"Mark Graaf ! Why, that is the very fellow who, when the Caffres first began to rise in arms and trouble the Colonial Government, attacked a party of the Queen's 45th, or Nottinghamshire Regiment."

"I never heard of it ; I must have been far away in the bush."

"A sergeant and fourteen privates, when escorting wag-gons to King William's Town, were surprised on the Debe Neck, and overpowered by a vast body of Caffres, who barbarously murdered the whole. They were found by Colonel Mackinnon's men with their throats cut from ear to ear ; and what further infuriated the troops was the discovery that they had all been horribly mutilated before death. Their next exploit was roasting three men alive on the Kat River, near the Little Winterberg, which compelled General Somerset to march there and give them a scourging."

"If this Mark Graaf attack me again—"

"There is no chance of that while we are with you, Dick. My sentries shall be relieved every hour till daybreak, when we must march again, and retrace our steps, you think?"

"Nearly so. I shall be your guide to the Amatolas. Now that the Caffres are everywhere in arms, my peaceful occupation of trader is completely gone ; so I may as well join the camp."

"All right, old fellow," replied Douglas. "I think you might easily get on the staff, with local rank. But, Dick, my dear old friend, I can't get over the surprise and coincidence of our meeting here, and in such a strange fashion."

"Ah you little thought to sit by my fire-side—"

"In the bush ?—ugh !"

## CHAPTER II.

IN my waggon there was a complete canteen—I'd had it in the Fusiliers—with breakfast and dinner equipage for two. It was speedily brought forth by my dusky attendant, Adrian Africander ; and Gerard and I had a tasty supper on a brace of broiled guinea-fowls which I had shot that morning by the margin of the Great Fish River.

The wooden canteens of the 74th men contained only *agua pura* ; but Adrian supplied them liberally with Cape Madeira from my keg in the waggon. So they drank the healths of Douglas and myself with three ringing cheers, that made the pine-woods of Hell's Kloof echo and reverberate again, while the piper struck up a merry runt on his warlike instrument.

"I am soldier enough to applaud that great principle of Major Dugald Dalgetty as a firstrate one on service."

"What principle was it, Douglas ? I don't remember."

"To lay in grub and grog whenever you have the chance lest a time should come when you can get neither."

"Another wing of the guinea-hen, Douglas."

"Thanks. 'May good digestion wait on appetite !'"

"Ah ! wonder when we shall ever see a play again ; but I

have been a leading character in many a queer sensation scene since I crossed the Equator."

"In Africa, Dick, we have a change of life with a vengeance," exclaimed Douglas.

"We are among a rum lot, certainly."

"No mess now, no pool in the evening, no balls or flirtations, with champagne iced, pink cream, and white kids; not even a quiet little rubber—no society whatever. A roadside snack off a buffalo hump; a shot at a tiger-wolf, a philander with a Caffre girl, a Boschmans belle, or a Fingo flirt in a necklace and nose-ring; and nothing more—a picnic in the Quagga Flats, a row with the Hottentots, or a rough brush in the woods with the naked rebels. Queer change, isn't it, from Britain and civilisation?"

"More queer than pleasant," said I. "But I had no idea that the 74th were in the Cape Colony. Away in the bush for so many months of every year, I rarely hear of aught that passes in the great world beyond it."

"Three months ago, I had little thought of being here. The regiment had received 'letters of readiness' from the Horse Guards; and though the actual route had not come, all were packed up, and all were prepared to start at a moment's notice. All were unsettled: invitations were declined or accepted conditionally; men on the verge of being hooked pleaded duty to keep aloof from the divine parties. We were lying at Cork, and were actually under orders for Old Gib! and for that place our heavy baggage, mess-plate, and spare armchests had already departed. Her Majesty's ship Vulcan, hove short on her anchor, lay at Queenstown to take us on board. We thought only of Spanish eyes and Andalusian ankles, of yachting at Algesiras, and shooting in the cork woods beyond the lines of San Roque, when their high mightinesses, the Horse Guards, countermanded the first order, as the demands of Sir Harry Smith for reinforcements were most urgent, as heaven only knew how many Caffres were in arms; and thus, after a three days' notice to prepare for a tropical climate, the 16th of March saw us off under sail and

steam for the Cape of Storms. As we swept past the admiral's ship at Queenstown, with our pipers on the poop playing "Farewell to Lochaber," the crews of the Hogue and Ajax mounted the yards and gave us three hearty cheers ; so that was our last of Old England—of jolly old Ireland, I mean. Our voyage out was stormy. Our women and children were left to weep and wait at Cape Town ; the regiment pushed on to the front towards the Amatola mountains (pretty name that, by the way) ; I was left to follow with one piper, two sergeants, and forty rank and file ; and here I am, Dick Haddon, hobbling and nobbing with you, my oldest and dearest friend."

"And now, Douglas," I asked in my turn, "what have you been doing with yourself all these years since we separated?"

"Doing ! O, playing the stale old game of life."

"Married yet?"

"No," he replied, a slight flush crossing his sunburnt cheek. "I am one of those who in the great lottery of the world have drawn only blanks. With me, life has been too often a desperate and a losing game."

"This is more like a portion of my history than yours, Douglas ; but you used to be somewhat tender, I remember, on Fanny Haywood."

"As you were on her sister Clarice. But she threw me over for another."

"Another !"

"Yes and married him too. That fellow Carysfort, who is now here on the staff."

"Here - do you say *here*?" I exclaimed with a nervous start.

"Yes. He came out before we embarked. I always meant to marry," resumed Douglas, speaking very fast, "after knocking about a few years with the regiment, and after becoming sick of balls and billiards, flirtation and flattery, and all that sort of thing. I don't like barrack-room matrimony—it takes the gloss off the most polished woman ; but when I am major, or perhaps brevet-lieutenant-colonel, if I can forget little

Fanny Haywood, I may marry some one, cut the service, and settle down into a quiet life of fogydomy in a snug cottage at home. I have no greater ambition." After a pause he asked, "How long have you led this queer kind of life, Dick?"

"For four years, Gerard,

" "The world forgetting, by the world forgot." "

"Four years!" reiterated Douglas, looking kindly and earnestly into my bronzed and bearded face, with much of commiseration in his tone. "You were ever supposed to be the patent axle-box of the wheel of the Blind Goddess, born with a silver spoon in your mouth."

"Was I? Well, it has only proved to be a wooden ladle, and of the largest dimensions too."

"Four years," resumed Douglas, musing.

"Yes, Gerard, ever since that miserable time when I lost my commission and Clarice together. From being a fashionable fellow in a crack regiment like the Fusiliers, it was a change, by Jove, to become a barterer of powder, shot, and old Tower muskets!"

"To those Caffre fellows who are now in arms against us."

"Unwittingly I have done mischief that way. A barterer of glass beads and brass buttons, wire, cheap trinkets, snuff, tobacco, and gew-gaws for Caffres and their squaws, receiving in exchange ivory, skins, and so forth; but I liked the roving life. I had sickened of civilisation and all its trammels; so the hourly danger encountered among Fingos and Caffres, escaped convicts, and other bushrangers, to say nothing of wild animals—the hyæna, the tiger-wolf, even the lion—was a species of intoxication, and taught me for a time to forget—well, yes, to forget—even Clarice Haywood."

"Poor Dick Haddon!"

"I have become hardy as a Greenland bear, and as handy as Robinson Crusoe—a crack shot, a finished waggon-driver and horseman, a keen trader, an intrepid hunter of the elephant and tiger-wolf. I have sold and bartered more in ivory and skins than any man of the Faderland from Kamiesbergen to



the Forest of Ingora. It is a jolly life, I can tell you, but a dangerous one ; and now that the Caffre devils are in arms, like the jealous Moor, my occupation's gone."

"Well, old fellow, I suppose you have made a nice pot of money?"

"Perhaps. It was deuced hard work at first. All the more so that I had left my heart behind me."

"And so, after sending in your papers to the Horse Guards, you grew sick of Europe."

"Sick of Europe !" I exclaimed bitterly. "Douglas, I grow sick of the world."

"Stuff, man ; don't be melodramatic."

"Fact, though. 'Few men long so ardently for another world as they whose hope has gone from this.'"

"Yet you have made money," persisted Douglas.

"The money made itself, or came upon me as if I had the power of Midas, the Phrygian king."

"What kind of power was that?"

"The art of turning into gold everything he touched."

"By George !" exclaimed Douglas, laughing, as he twirled his long dark brown moustaches, "a noble art. Wish we possessed it in the 74th. You were rather a wild fellow, Dick, in your Fusilier days."

"All that is changed now, for I have become a man of thought. Don't laugh at me, Gerard—yes, thought. Often amid the terrible desolation of these wild deserts, so lone and silent, a sense of religion and awe has stolen over me, filling my heart with unuttered prayer. I have felt it under the shadow of the Amatolas, by the silent shores of the Great Fish River, and the murmur of many a stream as yet unnamed in the green savannahs, and among the dingles of the untrodden forest."

"And what about little Isabelle Walmer? Every one knew how fond you were of her."

"*Was-a-belle*, I should think now."

"But you loved her?"

"Not at all. Only grew spooney in that dull country house,

when we lay at Colchester, and where there was no one but her old aunt, an older Abigail, and the tom-cat, so Isabelle had the preference."

"And kept your hand in."

"Just so," said I, impatiently.

"You know, perhaps, the unfortunate end of my love affair with Fanny Haywood; but yours with Clarice was always a mystery to me. Our regiment was ordered abroad just about the time, and I never got a clue to the story, or why you sold out, and disappeared from society so completely."

"You shall have a clue to the mystery now; but if told in all its details, as I afterwards heard them, my story may prove rather a long one. There is a bag of cavendish, or if you prefer cigars, there are plenty in my waggon."

"Why, Dick, your waggon is a perfect emporium. I am all attention, so fire away, my friend."

Most of Douglas's men, muffled in their gray greatcoats, had gone to sleep under and about my waggon. They were wearied by a long day's march, and slept soundly, each man with his crossbelts on, and a knapsack under his head.

Adrian Africander threw some fresh wood on the two fires, which burned cheerily. In their glow we could see the bayonets of the advanced sentinels glimmering redly. We replenished our horns from the keg of Cape Madeira, and then I related my story somewhat in the following fashion.

### CHAPTER III.

**THIS** singular meeting with you, Gerard Douglas (said I), has led my thoughts back into an old, but not forgotten track—to a life that seems long, long past—to sorrows and memories crushed out and conquered, if not for ever stifled. To suffer keenly, how often do we need but to revert to the memory of other times?

As for the years to come, "the veil which covers futurity has been woven by the hand of mercy." This is good and

well, for could we but see the future, we might never in almost any instance act as we do for the present.

"There are few lives," says a writer, "in which there has not been some incident, which, if candidly told, would not possess the power to stir another human heart, raise one throb of sympathetic emotion, or, perhaps, draw a sudden burst from eyes that are dry to their own sorrows. But who living possesses such candour as to tell the true story of his life?"

Despite this doubter, Gerard, I shall endeavour to be candid with you, and tell you how it came to pass that I, the senior lieutenant of the —th Fusiliers, and one of the most popular fellows in that crack regiment, am now, as you see me, a humble Caffre trader, half waggoner and wholly wild bush-ranger, under the shadow of the Amatola mountains.

I was at home on a year's leave at my uncle's house of Haddonrig, in Roxburghshire, when I first met the Haywood girls, who had come there on a visit with their father, old Toby Haywood, of Walcot, whose residence, as I need scarcely remind you, Douglas, is a kind of fortified tower of the old Border days, and lies between the southern slope of the Cheviots and the moors.

I had a natural interest in Haddonrig, as I knew that one day the place would be mine; for I was the only son of Halbert Haddon's only sister, and he never concealed the fact, that, when his time was over, the old house and lands must come to me.

The mansion is a small but picturesque and antique place. In memory I can still trace its quaint outline, which exhibits the Scottish architecture of two distinct ages. The characteristic ashlar-built tower of the reigns of the earlier Jameses, with the additions made in the time of Charles I., having crow-stepped gables and narrow grated windows, each with a shot-hole in its sill, for the house was near the English border, being only five miles or so from the fanciful line which divides the countries, and it had seen much of war and rapine round its walls since the time of their erection.

Indeed it was at Haddonrig that, until within the last few years, the English and Scotch farm labourers were wont to meet on the Saturday evenings for a weekly row with fist and cudgel—a folly only suppressed when the rural police were constituted.

The interior of the house had every modern luxury, for Uncle Halbert was a bachelor who loved his ease, and was, moreover, a man of taste. His library and wines were unsurpassed for careful selection, so was his assortment of pictures. He had great pieces of Flemish tapestry, woven after the cartoons of the masters of the sixteenth century; and trophies of swords and arquebusses that had figured in the Border wars, and helmets that had been cloven at Flodden Field and Ancrumford; Venetian and Bohemian glass, out of which the fifth James, after his Border raid, and his hapless daughter, after his progress to Jedburgh, had both drunk when they tarried at Haddonrig. There, too, were Aubusson and Smyrna carpets, and Heaven knows all what more; but any way it was a delightful old house to wander over.

One of Uncle Halbert's chief whims—you remember he was full of them—was to cultivate from seedlings numbers of the old Scots thistle in clefts about the rock on which the house is built. But the plant must always have been reared about old houses in Scotland, as it is so plentifully found among their ruins.

There was one feature, or personage rather, in my uncle's household, that I by no means relished or admired.

This was Mrs. Prudence Grubb—old Prue, as uncle called her—who, by years of cunning assiduity and watchful anticipation of every want and wish, had obtained—as housekeeper, nurse, and factotum—a wonderful, and, as it proved in the end, a dangerous ascendancy over the poor old gentleman; who, at the time I came home on leave, was past his seventieth year, and evidently used up, for he had lived a jolly life in his youth and prime.

In memory I can see the old man yet, clad in his unvarying suit—a blue coat with wide skirts and gilt buttons, an

ample white waistcoat coming over his swelling paunch, his sturdy legs encased in corded breeches and top-boots ; his silver hair, and his kind, benign smile, as he would linger in the window-seat over a glass of fine old port in the summer evenings, and gaze dreamily over the far extent of fertile country that was bounded by the Cheviots, with the spires of Kelso rising through the golden haze in the middle distance, the shining waters of the Teviot mingling with those of the Tweed under the stately bridge in the middle distance, with Ducal Fleurs crowning its grassy plateau on one side, and the wooded mound where stand the ruins of Roxburgh on the other.

When I last came home, after a seven years' absence, I found him sorely changed, and apparently older even than his years ; but a fall in the hunting-field had conduced to bring this about. Yet he was cheerful and jolly, and as Captain Toby Haywood and his two daughters, Clarice and Fanny, were at Haddonrig on a visit, our time was spent pleasantly enough.

The two old friends dozed about together among the stables and conservatories, and talked of stock and cross-breeds, of Cheviots and Southdowns, of copse-cutting, subsoil, and tile draining ; while I rode with the girls, or drove them in the pony phaeton to various places of interest in the neighbourhood—to Abbotsford, to Scott's grave, at Dryburgh ; to the Thorn, where James II. was killed ; to Melrose, which we "did" by moonlight, and so forth.

Then we had music and singing and great jollity in the evening, though the austere housekeeper, Mrs. Prudence Grubb, more than once had the assurance to resent the "innovation of such doings as allurements of the Evil One," and while speaking thereof she raised her eyes, not to heaven, but to the ceiling.

I had left Clarice Haywood a hoydenish lanky little gipsy of twelve, with whom I often squabbled because she quizzed my Scotch accent. I found her now expanded to a tall and beautiful English girl of nineteen, in the full bloom of her years, tender, gentle, soft and winning in manner, and in her

perfect guilelessness she was totally unlike any girl I had met wherever the Fusiliers had been ; and while with them I had seen and flirted with some of the prettiest women our garrison towns can present.

She had, as you know well, features that were far from regular, yet which were, when taken as a whole, perfectly lovely—her hair a bright chestnut, that seemed half golden in the sunshine ; her laughing eyes a soft hazel ; her ears, neck, and hands were faultless ; and to enhance her beauty to the utmost in my own eyes, I loved her !

You know how I loved that girl ; but, Gerard Douglas, one thing you *never* can know—the strange magic, the magnetic power, her eye and presence—more than all, the most trivial touch of her little hand—had over me !

I felt for her, and when with her, as I had never felt when in the society of any other woman ; and if there be any faith or truth in the idea or system of the duality of human existence, then Clarice Haywood is my other half.

The Haywoods were three months at Haddonrig, yet in all that time, though every action of mine implied that I loved her, I did not dare to tell Clarice so.

Why was this ? you may ask, for certainly I was not wont to be a bashful fellow.

I had left the regiment while loaded by gambling and other debts, and already my creditors and the colonel, with whom they had, perhaps, spitefully put themselves in communication, were hinting at the necessity for selling my commission, unless my uncle relieved me. Yet, influenced by some one against me on this occasion, he had not only withheld my usual allowance for six months, but further refused to advance me a shilling in my necessity.

Crops had been bad for some time past ; rain had spoiled one thing, and excessive drought another ; the rinderpest had destroyed whole herds of his cattle ; some of the tenants had totally failed in paying their rents ; thus, though Haddonrig stands in the very garden of Scotland, the lovely border-land, his exchequer was unfortunately very low ; mine was lower

still, and I dared not speak of love to Clarice, trembling, as I was then, on the verge of the Bankruptcy Court, unable alike to pay my debts or return to the regiment, while her father's lands of Walcot were, as I knew, entailed, and would pass from his daughters to a distant heir of his, leaving them with only a pittance each ; so I loved Clarice, and writhed in silence under the bitter conviction that my love was a mad and desperate one.

Who was the enemy that had influenced my usually kind old uncle against me at this most critical time? I was not long in discovering her to be Mrs. Prudence Grubb, his old female factotum.

She was a tall, thin, prim-faced personage, in her forty-fifth year, with a reddish nose, and a red spot on each of her high Scotch cheek-bones, the result perhaps of her brandy cordials. She had cold, gray, glistening, gimlet eyes, that seemed to look through one. She always wore a dark stuff dress, with a clean starched collar, and a cap like a Quakeress ; and she glided about with the soft stealthiness of a cat, with her hands meekly crossed before her, and her eyelids cast down ; yet the beldame was remarkably wideawake for all that.

She had a frequent visitor in the shepherd of the flock to which she belonged—some very low species of dissent indeed ; and she had, as I afterwards learned, a friend of a more questionable kind, in the character of a certain Mark Sharkeigh, a convicted thief and inveterate poacher of the preserves and rivers, who loafed about the adjacent village with a ticket-of-leave in his pocket.

During my uncle's illness and weakness, consequent on the fall from his horse when hunting, she had wormed herself into his most secret confidence, and even contrived to engraft some of her hypocritical cant upon him, while giving out in the neighbourhood that he meant to marry her, to marry her and—*credat Judeus* !—bestow upon her the estate of Haddonrig, while cutting off me, “ his dissolute nephew, the brand which would not be rescued from the burning,” with the shilling



usually bequeathed to such prodigals for the purchase of a halter.

It was by the merest chance, while waiting at a lonely smithy to have a cast shoe of my horse replaced—a smithy at which I was quite unknown, a sequestered place on the Melrose road—that I overheard something of these rumours, and mentioned them over our wine after dinner to Uncle Halbert.

He reddened with anger and said :

“Poor Prue is not to blame for the gossip of a rascally countryside. She is a servant devoted to my interest—a faithful housekeeper—a pious, enthusiastic, and most disinterested vessel.”

“Vessel !” I echoed ; “have you actually caught the spirit of her cant—of her shabby, out-at-elbow shepherd, uncle ? She is a cursed old utensil I would send to the right about,” I added angrily.

“Don’t say so, Dick. You misjudge her, and I fear you shock her greatly by your rough, barrack-room ways.”

She had been close by—when was the woman ever otherwise?—and had overheard my remarks, and her grey eyes glared at me with malice and hate. I could see her pale, pinched features reflected in a mirror opposite, and felt instinctively that she would work me a mischief if she could, and in the sequel she did so with a vengeance.

#### CHAPTER IV.

UNCLE HALBERT was a keen sportsman ; but the time was past now for his going forth in search of game, so all the preserves were at my disposal. Prior to leaving Haddonrig on a visit to Walcot, for whence the Haywoods were departing, I was not sorry to kill the time and the birds together ; but my mind was so occupied by the thought of Clarice, and every feature of the scenery so reminded me of her that I made but an indifferent sportsman, and expended so much ammunition on the sky that the dogs cocked their ears in bewilderment, and Bagshot, the old gamekeeper, was aghast.

“To the susceptible or imaginative there are few emotions more sad and depressing than to revisit alone the places where we have been happy in the society of others, of those we have loved, the absent, or the dead.

But inexorable time pressed upon me, and in the wretched state of my monetary affairs I had permitted my brown-eyed Clarice to depart without telling her that I loved her.

“My blessing go with you, young ladies,” said Mrs. Prudence Grubb, curtsying, with secret dislike lurking in her grey eyes while pocketing the sovereigns given for distribution among the servants, as I handed the girls to their carriage; “accept my thanks, too,” she added in her drawling tone, “as I care not for the dross—the lucre of this earth. Oh! what availeth it us if we ‘lay up gold as dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks’? You laugh, Miss Haywood,” she added severely, for Clarice did laugh pretty openly.

“Pardon me, Mrs. Grubb, but really I could not help it,” replied the girl blushing.

“Laughter out of season is dangerous. ‘Woe unto ye who laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep,’ so said our worthy shepherd at the tabernacle yesterday.”

“Pray don’t preach a sermon out of church, Mrs. Grubb,” said the bluff captain bluntly. “Thanks for your attention to my girls. I’ll send you some prime rum that has twice doubled the Cape, and you are welcome to comfort the shepherd with a drop of it.”

At this remark she scowled after the carriage that bore the Haywoods away.

Clarice was gone!

Restless, sleepless, unable to eat, or to concentrate my thoughts on anything save on her—her face ever before me in memory or imagination, her voice seeming ever to linger in my ear. Thus, if I attempted to shoot, I missed every bird; to hunt, and I, who whilom was the first to run in upon the fox, was often left in the lurch; and once, by Jove! up to the neck in a wet ditch.

At the parish cricket match, the first ball bowled me out—I, who could keep my wicket against any man of Ours, officer or private.

All other women, however pretty or winning, bored me. I was bewitched, in fact. When not with her I was lonely indeed, and in my day dreams I was ever communing with her, and placing loving speeches in her pretty mouth.

At last my uncle roused me to action by the information that I must attend to his interests, because that, since he had become an invalid, his lands were overrun by poachers, but chiefly by a rascal named Mark Sharkeigh, whom I was to capture if I could.

“If you can’t catch him, Dick, for the fellow is as strong as a bull, just shoot him down like a dog, and I’ll back you up against all the pettifogging lawyers in Scotland,” said the old gentleman, his face crimsoned with gout and passion, as he struck his cane on the floor, and half wheeled his elbow-chair round in his energy of purpose. “When Haddonrig is yours, Dick—”

“Long may that day be of coming, uncle.”

“I hope so too; but when it does come, as come it must, you will then know something of the troubles we country gentlemen are subjected to. By midsummer the newspapers teem with advertisements, offering dogs, guns, breech-loaders, bags, and ammunition for sale; and then every fellow, even to a tailor’s apprentice, aspires to be a sportsman. We must fire off our counter advertisements concerning poachers, trespassers, spring-guns, man-traps, and the utmost vengeance of the law. Begad, Dick, between keepers, prosecutions, and so forth, I calculate that the game on Haddonrig cost me fully a guinea a head; and yet rascals like this Mark Sharkeigh supply the markets of Edinburgh and elsewhere with grouse and pheasants from my preserves—with salmon from the Tweed after the net-fishing closes.”

To capture this fellow and his companions, whose guns were frequently heard waking the echoes of the woods and on the hill slopes in the twilight, was to me rather a congenial em-

ployment, as it smacked of professional strategy and danger; besides, I was nothing loath that Clarice Haywood should see my name figuring in the *Kelso Chronicle*, and other local papers.

On the first of September—the day on which all sportsmen know that partridge shooting begins—old Bagshot, the head keeper, and I sallied forth by daybreak, on such a morning as a keen sportsman would have chosen, and proceeded straight to a place where on the preceding evening we had seen several plump coveys whirring about.

Not a bird was to be found.

There were the strongest symptoms of the place having been netted on the preceding night, and that a clean sweep had been made of every partridge. A fragment of a dirty red and blue worsted cravat, such as Mark Sharkeigh was well known to wear, was found in the coppice, fluttering from an alder bush. So we returned with a clue to the culprit, to breakfast at the lodge, and with amazement and anger withdrew the useless charges from our guns.

My uncle was furious, and urged us to go forth again, for he knew well that the contents of that preserve had been sped ere sunrise, along the line of rail to Edinburgh or Berwick, and were now, doubtless, fluttering in braces at the windows of the game dealers' shops.

"Retake the field, Dick, and try your luck in the Chapel Hopes," said my uncle; "but capture that scoundrel Sharkeigh if you can—"

"And if I cannot?"

"Then put a charge of buck-shot into him, and level straight at his brisket."

Mrs. Prudence turned up her pale gray eyes, and raised her hands, on hearing this order given—"this barbarous order," as she ventured to say.

We had scarcely commenced operations in the Chapel Hopes—a hollow place, full of rich fern and stunted fir-trees, where in ancient times a chapel had stood—when certain shots drew us off to the right. Running, with our guns at the trail, and

stooping behind the crest of a grassy ridge, we came suddenly upon three tattered-looking fellows, who were deliberately loading their guns, after having knocked over several birds in light of open day.

"Surrender, Mark Sharkeigh !" cried Bagshot, our keeper, advancing resolutely upon a tall, powerful, and ferocious-looking fellow, evidently of gipsy blood by the blackness of his eyes and his tangled locks, and the swarthy hue of his complexion. Around his neck was a fragment of the same red and blue worsted muffler which we had found in the copse that morning.

"Surrender, all of you," I cried, "and give up your guns and game."

Sharkeigh laughed scornfully, and displayed in doing so a white and glistening row of large and strong teeth. He stood on his guard, but his two companions fled into the thicket pursued by the keepers, while I alone advanced on Mark, never doubting but that he would yield.

I, however, had completely mistaken my man.

"Come, fellow, don't make a fool of yourself," said I calmly ; "you know you have no business here, and that I, as my uncle's representative, have both law and right on my side."

But he stood boldly confronting me, with his gun cocked and the stock resting at his thigh, as if about to charge bayonet.

"Stand back, Captain Haddon," said he ; "I mean not to harm you, but you are speaking to one who is desperate and reckless of all consequences."

"Why so ?"

"Why so ? Men in this world must be either scoundrels or fools—wolves or lambs."

"Indeed !"

"Yes ; so I prefer being a scoundrel and a wolf," replied the poacher savagely. "Yet I am only what men and misfortune have made me. I warn you that, so sure as heaven hears me, if you advance one step nearer I will lodge the contents of both these barrels in your skull."

His teeth were set, his black eyes shot fire, his swarthy cheek grew deadly pale, and the veins on his forehead were swollen like cords ; and every way he seemed perfectly capable of putting his daring threat in execution.

"Dare you talk thus to me?" said I sternly. "You, a felon, the holder of a ticket-of-leave, which this night shall see cancelled."

He uttered a laugh so wild and hollow, while a spasm worked all his pale face, that I became startled, and felt something like compunction steal into my heart when he said—

"Ever and always that taunt. In vain have I searched for honest employment, for hard work and bare food, even bread and water, but who would employ the felon—the convict? I have been an Ishmael, an outcast among you, every man's hand against me, and mine against all. So keep back, I say, Captain Haddon, or I shall shoot you like a dog."

The fellow spoke well, for he was a Yetholm gipsy, and had been educated at the parish school ; but for me to stand idle after such a threat—I, a gentleman on his own land, an officer in Her Majesty's service—was not to be thought of. The insult was intolerable. I, too, cocked my breech-loader, and advanced warily, with the intention of firing or rushing upon him as necessity might require, when the sudden barking of dogs in our rear made him pause with irresolution, and look round for a moment. With their pointers, our two keepers were issuing from the copse, covered with blood, and severely beaten, having evidently got the worst in their scuffle with Sharkeigh's companions.

In the excitement of the moment, even the slight action of turning half-round caused his fingers to press the triggers of his gun. The cap on one barrel snapped, the other exploded, and the contents whistled past me closely.

I then rushed furiously on with my clubbed rifle, and dealt him a dreadful blow on the head. The powerful ruffian reeled and staggered wildly about, as if striving to grasp the air or grapple with something... His head was not fractured, though terribly cut ; yet the stock of my rifle was snapped in two at the small part of the butt.

On seeing the keepers approaching, he uttered a hoarse exclamation of rage and defiance, and rushed down a steep bank to where the Teviot, still swollen by the torrents of the last Lammas floods, was rolling past in foam.

"Stop, for the love of heaven !" I exclaimed. "Stop, poor wretch—you will certainly be drowned !"

But he plunged recklessly in, swam over in safety, and disappeared in a dense thicket on the opposite side.

Ere he did so, however, he shook his clenched hand at me, in token that he would yet be revenged ; and, oddly enough, he joined issue with Mrs. Prudence Grubb to achieve that desirable end, which they brought about in a very remarkable manner.

Tidings of this encounter, and of Sharkeigh's escape, had a serious effect on my now irritable uncle, and brought on an access of gout, which prostrated him in bed.

Time stole swiftly on. My creditors were becoming more and more pressing ; my leave of absence was gradually drawing to a close, and if my uncle's health permitted, the last few weeks of it were to be spent at Walcot with the Haywoods.

"To quit the service is to court utter ruin," I would say to myself at times. "Shall I take a middle course, and only quit the Fusiliers : what the deuce is to be done then ? A bungalow among the Pandies— a log house in Canada—a shy at the hill tribes of Madras, or the Maories of New Zealand. But Clarice—how about Clarice ? Can I leave her ? And yet, to marry on a subaltern's pay is a madness not to be thought of in these days."

## CHAPTER V.

AFTER the brawl I have just described, many days passed on without any event. We were disturbed no more by trespassers, and neither I nor the rural police heard anything of Mark Sharkeigh or his companions. They were supposed to have crossed the Border, and to have transferred the scene of their nefarious poaching to some of the English estates in Northumberland.



My uncle was ailing and confined to bed, but was reported by the doctors to be progressing favourably, and as a pressing invitation came to me from old Captain Haywood, reminding me that I had promised to shoot over the moors with him for a few days, I prepared to set out for Walcot, with but one idea in my mind, to bring to an issue for good or for evil my love affair with Clarice, if I can so term it, for as yet all the regard seemed on my side—a wretched species of silent love.

Ere leaving Haddonrig I was most anxious to bring before my usually kind uncle the painful state of my money matters, and my views with regard to his favourite, Clarice Haywood, in the hope that he would make some settlement, however small, upon me, pay something to my creditors, or enable me to effect an exchange into a less expensive corps; but a strange coldness with which he had treated me of late, and my knowledge of a constitutional horror he had imbibed of making wills, last testaments, and settlements of all kinds withheld me; and, moreover, Mrs. Prudence Grubb, with folded hands, downcast eyes, and cat-like footsteps, haunted his apartment like a veritable spy.

“What the devil does that old woman want?” thought I. “What can her little game be?”

On the day I was to leave, when the dogcart which was to take me to the train was at the door, with my dogs, guns, and portmanteau, when I came to bid him adieu, he drew back the curtain of his bed, and regarded me with more kindness than usual, and with a glistening eye. I then saw that his cheeks and temples were sunk and hollow, and I felt conscious that he looked seriously ill: but the selfish longing to see Clarice lured me from the old man’s side, and, as it proved, at a critical time too.

“Take care of yourself, Dick, my boy,” he whispered, as I bent over him. “This is but the beginning of the end, for the gout is mounting fast, and Haddonrig will soon be yours, farm and moorland, hill and wood. Love to old Toby Haywood, kiss his girls for me, and for yourself too, if you please.”

A well-known suit of clothes which he wore daily, and which he seldom or never varied in fashion or colour, had been removed from the side of his bed by Prudence Grubb, carefully brushed, and, as she said, 'put past,' as if some time must certainly pass before he could wear them again. Even his broad-brimmed white hat and yellow cane were removed.

I know not why it was that I marked those little trifles then, but I remembered them all afterwards with a terrible significance.

We parted—on my side with some undefinable forebodings of evil to come, and I drove off to reach the station of the North British Railway, from whence a branch line would take me to that part of Northumberland where Walcot Tower stood among the moors.

I had plenty of time. The down train from Edinburgh was not due for an hour yet, the morning was lovely, and involved in reverie I walked the horse through one of those narrow paths we call a loan—the Chapel Loan, between high and thick hedgerows, where the tall purple foxglove and the variegated fern grew rank upon the old, old oak trees, that in other days had seen the monks pass thence to serve mass in the chapel, of which the last stones had long since been obliterated by the ploughshare.

I heard voices on the other side of the hedge, which was in full leaf, and too dense to permit me to see the speakers; but their voices were familiar enough to me. My horse was going at a slow walk, the soft, thick grass muffled the tread of his hoofs, and as for the patent axles of the trap, they emitted no sound.

"Unless, with the help of the Lord, this game is played at once and surely too, we need never play it at all," said a woman's voice.

"Mrs. Prudence Grubb, for fifty pounds," thought I.

"Well, I'm your man for it, whenever you like," responded her companion.

"You are going to Satan, at all events, even as a brand goeth to the burning, Mark."

"Come, don't cant, whatever you may do, Mother Humbug ; and as for going to Old Nick, there's a pair of us, and there are two advantages in doing so. I've heard the road is easy, and we are sure to get there. But I'm your man as I said, mistress, and I'll meet you at Church Walcot on the English side. You've made all square there, I hope."

"All—everything."

"*He* taunted me as a ticket-of-leave man ! By heavens, I'll see him a beggar and an outcast in his uncle's house yet."

"Hallo, Mark Sharkeigh," cried I, reining in ; "what game is this you and old Prue are up to?"

The voices ceased at once, and when I stood up in the trap to look over the hedge, the speakers had disappeared where the trees were dense beyond ; but they were the pious house-keeper, one of the shining lights of the shepherd's tabernacle, and the crime-blackened poacher Sharkeigh, I could not for a moment doubt. The plot or plan they had in view was beyond my comprehension, save that it had some reference to me.

The train soon whisked me along the southern base of the Cheviots and past the Moor of Kidland. I soon saw the quaint border tower, which was the residence of the Haywoods, rising above the coppice, and the sight of the roof under which she whom I loved dwelt made the pulses of my heart beat quicker.

Old Toby received me with open arms, and Clarice with an air of coy reserve, a timid, downcast expression in her soft brown eyes, that was very enchanting, and from which I augured well. But the sturdy and impetuous Squire of Walcot scarcely left us a moment together. After luncheon, when I was dying to "do" the conservatories and forcing-houses with Clarice, he hurried me over his stable, his kennel, his gun-room, and on the first morning hurried me all over the property, to show me where the thickest coveys were to be found ; where he had cultivated ferns for one species of birds, and planted belts of small firs for others, with strips of turnips to lure the little deer and rabbits out of the plantations, and so forth.

Next day, by gray dawn, and ere the first red ray of sunlight had brightened the summits of the Cheviot range, we had opened the campaign against the feathered tribe, and in our first engagement, which was a sanguinary one, for Toby's preserves were among the best along the English border, we were accompanied by two or three keen sportsmen, one of whom was a total stranger to me, but who proved to be the Reverend Mr. Flewker, curate of the parish, who, as he had once been an officer of the line, was—for that reason and no other—an especial favourite with old Squire Haywood.

On this morning he declined the most pressing invitations to breakfast with us at Walcot Tower, and saying that he had a marriage ceremony to perform at his little church by the moorside, threw an ample bag of game over his shoulder and strode away, promising to ride over to dinner at an early day—a promise which, it is worth remarking, a sudden and severe illness prevented him from fulfilling, otherwise I might have made a singular discovery in time.

My uncle's dangerous illness led me to fear—loving him as I did, I shrank from thinking of the phrase to hope—that Haddonrig would soon be mine to share with Clarice; and feeling confident in the good old man's regard for us both, I cast prudence to the winds, and resolved to tell her of my passion, and if possible, engage her to me.

It would be intolerable if we were to calculate every eventuality in life, for then the world would stand still. To let to-morrow take care of to-morrow, has been too often my maxim—or necessity, rather.

In the evening after a long day's shooting, I pretended to have a headache, consequent on so much firing with my double-barrelled breech-loader, and tolerating all old Toby's quizzing on the subject of any amount of firing giving one of the —th Fusiliers such an ailment, leaving Fanny with Isabelle Walmer at the piano, I succeeded in drawing away Clarice from the house, through the conservatories, and even beyond the gardens. We chatted of various indifferent subjects, while the sun sank behind the Cheviots, and the shadows were

beginning to deepen on the moors, and we reached a green knoll which was crowned by the ruin of an old border tower, burned by the Scots in some long-past raid or invasion.

How well I can remember every detail of this delightful evening, when I learned for the first time that Clarice Haywood loved me, and me only.

She seated herself on a fragment of the moss-grown wall, and playfully twirled her parasol to and fro on her shoulder with a rapid motion of her tightly-gloved little hand, permitting the red rays of the sinking sunlight to flash on her rounded cheek, and to tinge, as if with gold, her bright brown hair. She seemed to become thoughtful, and I grew silent, as I reclined on the turf at her feet, and looked, not at the bold and beautiful Northumberland scenery, the deep, narrow, and sequestered glens of the Cheviots, which ostensibly we had sallied forth to admire, but into the soft and earnest hazel eyes of Clarice.

And as she twirled her parasol playfully, with much of witchery in her eyes and tone, she sang a verse of our favourite song, "Remembrance."

"Ah to forget ! the wish were vain !  
Our souls were formed thus fond to be ;  
No more I'll murmur and complain,  
For thou, my love, wilt think on me."

"I have lured you to some distance from Walcot Tower," said I, in default of something better to say.

"About three miles."

"Three miles ! They have seemed to me but a hundred yards."

"Has the time passed so swiftly—so pleasantly ?"

"How could it pass otherwise when with you ?"

"How Scotch you are," said she, laughing, "answering one question by asking another. Are you already longing to return ?"

"Longing, Miss Haywood ! Not at all !"

"Not even to see Isabelle ?"

"What Isabelle ? Who ?"

"Isabelle Walmer, with whom I saw you flirting so furiously after dinner."

"We were merely talking and laughing," said I, with something of pique.

"Pretty loudly too."

"The surest sign that there was no flirtation in the case," I urged.

"True ; for the deepest kind of flirtation is that which meets neither the eyes nor ears of outsiders."

"Exactly."

"You can flirt, I have no doubt," continued Clarice, bending her clear brown eyes with a waggish smile down on mine ; "officers generally become pretty good hands at it. But who, now, would believe that my dear old pet papa was once a great man in that way, and such a 'round' dancer, too, as I have heard old ladies say?"

"The same wonder may—nay, must—be expressed about us in our turn. But as for flirting with your friend Miss Walmer, I might do that easily enough with her or any other pretty girl."

"Then I must conclude that I am a plain girl?"

"Why?"

"Because you never flirt with me."

This was a leading remark.

"With you !" said I, in a low voice. "No, that, indeed, I could not do."

"Why so?" she asked, almost in a tone of pique, while her fine eyes dilated.

"It would be playing with fire. Moreover, we cannot flirt where we feel deeply, and for me to attempt it with you, Miss Haywood, circumstanced as I am, would end—"

"In what?" she asked tremulously, as I paused.

"In loving you madly."

Her eyes drooped, but they were dancing with delight and triumph, yet the girl was the reverse of a coquette. My heart beat wildly—I was approaching the Rubicon. I stole her hand in mine, but she withdrew it, and with this little action,

and the thought of all my difficulties, my heart sank, and for a time I became silent. She, too, was silent, and the pause was full of mingled awkwardness and joy.

She knew that I loved her, and fully expected me to tell her so. At last I summoned courage to say—

“Dear Miss Haywood—nay, permit me to say, dear Clarice—”

“Well,” said she, trembling more and more.

“Yes; flirtation with you would end in my loving you madly—aye, perhaps more than I do now.”

“Oh, Mr. Haddon—”

“Listen to me.” I continued rapidly. “In a month or so I must be far away from this, but for which quarter of the globe I know not—however, certainly not to rejoin the Fusiliers at Gibraltar. I have here a farewell gift, a gold chain, for you. In exchange for it, will you give me the blue ribbon that is round your dear little neck?”

She grew very pale now, and the long lashes drooped lower over her eyes. Then, with fingers that trembled a little, and while a beautiful smile spread over her sweet and downcast face, she nervously unfastened the velvet ribbon from her slender, white throat, and gave it to me.

I kissed it, and saying :

“Wear this for my sake, Clarice—dearest Clarice,” I clasped a gold necklet in its place.

Then our lips met for the first time, and from that moment I was a lost man.

A strange silence seemed to steal over us, and over all the twilight scenery. We heard only the rustle of the old trees about the ruined tower, and the murmur of a mountain burn at the base of the green mound. I did not press her then to give me promises, but our hearts were full of our new happiness—the great and pure happiness of a first love.

(At this point of my story I drew from a secret pocket of my rough, patched, and shabby hunting blouse a little morocco case, and, opening it, showed Gerard Douglas the velvet ribbon. Its tint of blue had almost faded into white now,

for it had been with me in all my wanderings amid the hot African deserts, and I treasured it even as a pilgrim might treasure his fragment of the true Cross.)

I was first roused from my dream by seeing a figure appear suddenly at a little distance between two clumps of trees—a figure, the outline of which was distinct in the clear but fading twilight of the summer evening.

It was that of my uncle Halbert, so far as costume went ; his wide-skirted blue coat with shining brass buttons, his ample white vest, his corded breeches and top-boots, even his peculiar hat and yellow cane were there, but the figure seemed ungainly, and taller, and thinner than his.

Could it be my uncle who had risen from his bed of sickness? or, heavens ! was it—if such things could be—his wraith—his double-gauger—or his spirit, after death?

I started to my feet, but the figure instantly disappeared among the trees, and I passed my hand across my eyes, believing that what I had seen was but an optical delusion.

I gave my arm to Clarice—my Clarice now—whom I could not leave to pursue or investigate this appearance, and with her hand tenderly clasped in mine, we slowly proceeded homeward ; and as we did so, the usual vows and rings were exchanged, and our new engagement was duly signed and sealed without the aid of lawyers.

I made no secret of my monetary difficulties, and told how long they had fettered my tongue by a just spirit of honour, and in the fulness of her happy heart Clarice made light of them. I spoke of the hopes I had that my uncle would deal kindly with me—with *us* (how sweet the conjunction sounded)—and added, that when God took the good old gentleman to Himself that Haddonrig would then be ours, and so forth, with much more to the same purpose ; so that on this evening the world looked, somehow, remarkably “rosy,” if one may use a phrase so slangy.



## CHAPTER VI.

THE figure I had seen in the twilight proved to be that of the fugitive poacher, Mark Sharkeigh, and not to keep you behind the curtain I may as well mention that on the very morning of the day on which I had played a part so important to my future happiness in life, a plot for my utter destruction had been ably worked out elsewhere.

On that forenoon, when the Rev. Mr. Flewker declined to favour us with his society at Walcot Tower, a couple, armed with proper credentials, as I was afterwards fully informed, had the hardihood to present themselves at the little and sequestered fane of Church Walcot, to be bound in the holy state of matrimony.

The aspect of the man was odd, and his bearing vulgar ; but the manner and dress of the woman, in her black silk gown, clean and modest crimped cap, were unexceptionable in respectability and tone. However, their names, when read over by the stolid and immovable clerk in his thick Northumbrian burr, caused the Rev. Mr. Flewker to start.

"Halbert Haddon, of Haddonrig, bachelor, and Mrs. Prudence Grubb, widow of the late Judas Grubb, schoolmaster and session clerk there."

"Are you Mr. Haddon, of the Rig, in Roxburghshire ?" asked the clergyman, raising his eyebrows with wonder.

"The same, sir," replied the unabashed Sharkeigh, somewhat nervously, however, polishing the nap of my uncle's peculiarly broad-brimmed white hat, which was so well known in the hunting-field.

"You are surely a very young-looking man—for your years, I mean."

"Perhaps so ; but I don't believe we have ever met before, sir."

"No, I do not think I have had the pleasure ; but your name has been so long before the public as presiding at county and agricultural meetings, that I certainly expected to see a much older gentleman."

"Appearances are often deceptive," replied the confident rascal, who was closely shaven and well polished up for the interesting occasion, but who tugged his forelock in a groom-like fashion, which increased still more the bewilderment of Mr. Flewker, and even that of his clerk and an assistant gravedigger, who had been hastily summoned from his grim occupation to witness the ceremony.

"Yes, sir, appearances are deceptive," said Mrs. Grubb, who stood near the altar-rail, with folded hands and meekly-downcast face; "too often deceptive in this valley of tears," she added, lifting her pale cunning eyes, not to heaven, but to the whitewashed ceiling.

Great though the game in view, dangerous though the terrible farce in hand, they could not have practised it with success before the shepherd of her tabernacle, the Rev. Benjamin Bareham, who was sufficiently familiar with the personal appearance of my uncle; and as Walcot was only some twenty miles or so from Haddonrig, the border-line lying midway between, they had crossed into England to be married there, all the required certificates and formulæ having been procured or prepared before.

Still lingering, book in hand, and eyeing dubiously the bride and bridegroom, Mr. Flewker remarked:

"Three Sundays in succession did I read out your banns in this church without having the slightest thought of who Halbert Haddon was. I have been shooting over the moors all the morning with your nephew, Mr. Richard—why is he not here?"

The loving pair seemed somewhat discomposed by this question; but Mrs. Grubb replied, in her most whining tone:

"We have the best of reasons for keeping him in ignorance of all this. The blessed Lord alone knoweth what a heart-break he is to his good uncle there."

"Ay, the Lord alone," added Sharkeigh, with a wink at the clergyman, who was becoming somewhat irritated by his irreverent bearing.

"I trust to your honour as a gentleman, and to your char-

acter as a Christian clergyman, that you will keep our wedding a secret till the time comes for divulging it," said Mrs. Grubb with great earnestness.

Mr. Flewker bowed an assent, and desired them to kneel down, and then the terrible mockery began, while the rays of the summer sun stole through the painted glass and stone traceries of the old church windows, and fell on the bowed heads of those two wretched conspirators, till the last irrevocable words were uttered, the book was closed, and the poacher and the hypocrite were united till death should part them !

Mr. Flewker and his clerk unluckily kept "the wedding" a secret long enough to ruin me. The lines and register were duly signed—the gravedigger, who was as deaf as a post, making his mark as a witness—and then the "happy couple" adjourned to the nearest public-house, the Walcot Arms, to have a glass of something over it.

There ensued a conversation which was overheard by the landlady, who, being of an inquiring disposition, applied her ear and eye alternately to a hole in the wooden partition from which a knot had fallen out, thus leaving a useful orifice ; and of that conversation, which excited her curiosity to the utmost, I had duly a report, but it also came too late to help me.

"Drink your ale, sir," said Mrs. Grubb sharply. "I must not miss the two o'clock train ; and now that we are married, and the game—"

"Is not yet played out, mistress," said he with a hideous leer.

"What do you mean?"

"That I won't leave you till to-morrow, my pigeon, and not even then, unless—"

"Dare you threaten me?" asked Mrs. Grubb, trembling.

Sharkeigh grinned, and said :

"Unless you hand over to me, Mrs. Sharkeigh or Haddon, whichever you please—"

"The sum agreed upon, of course."

"Ten times the sum agreed upon!" cried Sharkeigh, striking the table with his hand ; "though, to be revenged on Richard

Haddon for the blow he gave me, I'd freely have done all this for a stoup of whisky."

"Without the help of the Lord, where am I to procure ten times the sum? You are mad, Mark Sharkeigh."

"Stop your confounded whining!" said the other furiously.

"Where can you get it? Out of that black box in your room, mistress. Do you think I've never peeped through the house windows when after the game of a night?"

"But if I won't?"

"Then I'll split on you, wife of my bosom, and go to the nearest magistrate to make my solemn 'davy about all this business."

The prudent and pious worshipper at the Tabernacle grew pale on hearing this threat. Hatred and fear alike filled her heart, yet she was compelled to dissemble.

"Here is the fifty pound note I promised you, Mark," said she in a low voice, which she meant to be insinuating.

"Nine more like it must come," replied Sharkeigh, as he clutched and pocketed the money. "You have shown yourself deuced sharp in roguery, mistress," he added, as he buried his lip and nose in a foaming tankard of ale.

"All who are sharper than their neighbours, or whom the Lord has gifted with any talent, are deemed rogues by the less lucky, Mark."

"Less lucky—curse you!—meaning such as I, perhaps?"

"Yes; but it is different if one turns their sharpness to good rather than to selfish ends."

"How about you, then?" asked Sharkeigh, with a stare, or rather a glare, in his eyes; for the blow I had given him was said to have affected his brain, especially when he drank.

"My end is good and unselfish," replied Prudence.

"The deuce it is!"

"I save Haddonrig from that spendthrift nephew, who would make ducks and drakes of it, every rood and acre. The blessed Tabernacle and our good shepherd shall benefit thereby—"

"The deuce take them both!" said Sharkeigh, as his eyes

flashed. "Once the old fellow goes, why should I not stay in his comfortable diggings, and be laird of Haddonrig, you infernal beldame?"

"For two very simple reasons, Mark Sharkeigh."

"And these are—"

"That I can only procure possession of the place through old Hab's death, on which I come forth as his widow."

"What more?"

"Your necessary disappearance. You are known over all the border side as Mark Sharkeigh, the poacher, the Yetholm gipsy, the ticket-of-leave man; and money elsewhere is more useful to you than to remain here for a day longer in your real character."

"True," said he sulkily; adding, with an oath, "and money I shall have, mistress, by fair means or foul!"

So the worthy couple separated.

On that night Mrs. Prudence Grubb's chamber at Haddonrig was found to have been forcibly entered. Her beloved strongbox, with the savings and peculations of years—an accumulation known to herself alone—was gone; but in its place lay the entire suit of clothes worn so recently by her bridegroom at Church Walcot.

Mark Sharkeigh was never seen on the borders again; but rumours said that he was afterwards transported for life in consequence of crimes committed by him in England, and that the ship which was conveying him and others to a penal settlement had perished at sea.

## CHAPTER VII.

IN total ignorance of all this deep-laid scheme, I spent a happy, happy fortnight at Walcot with the Haywoods. I soon had a most satisfactory explanation with dear old Toby—not a solemn one in the library, but a jolly interview over our wine and post-prandial cigar in the smoking-room; and he promised to see "all square," as he phrased it, with my uncle.

Knowing how his own estate was situated by the entail, and

how dependent his girls would be on the next remote male heir, he was not sorry to see the eldest in so fair a way of being settled for life as the bride of one he had known from boyhood.

How joyously the summer days flew past Clarice and me ! Our hearts were full of love—we forgot all about money, or that there was any necessity for it.

“Don’t fancy,” says Lever, “that you are going to get love and money too. It is only in novels that such luck exists.”

From our happy daydreams we were roused by a messenger on horseback—old Bagshot, the keeper—from Haddonrig. My uncle was dangerously ill, and I must return at once if I would see him alive, for the gout had mounted to his heart and lungs.

“My poor old friend,” said Toby Haywood, as I mounted his best horse ; “I fear it is all up with him now. But send us over word as soon as you can, Dick.”

I kissed Clarice. The honest and kind-hearted girl was weeping freely, for she loved my old uncle well.

“Clarice,” said I, “our joy cannot come without the alloy of sorrow ; but heaven arranges all things.”

Then I gave my horse the spur, and accompanied by Bagshot, took the nearest road over the Cheviots homeward, and soon reached Haddonrig.

On entering my uncle’s chamber, the changes I saw there shocked me. There was, of course, the close and oppressive atmosphere usual in the chamber of the sick ; but numbers of unopened letters and unread newspapers littered the floor and the table by his bedside, as if to show by the neglect of them how heedless he had already become to the affairs of this world, and there, too, were physic phials, pill-boxes, and a cord that communicated with the room bell.

He mingled a malediction with his welcome, for he was in great agony, and then he added—

“Hand me the colchicum bottle. Six-and-twenty drops, my dear Dick—six-and-twenty—I can’t do with less for a dose.”

I speedily gave him what he required, and then he spoke again.

"I wish you had come sooner, Dick ; but I suppose Clarice Haywood was more attractive than your old growling bear of an uncle. I've been sadly neglected of late, so pardon my irritability. Old Prue, who used to be so faithful, leaves me almost entirely to myself now, and for two whole days she—she was absent collecting for the missionary fund of her Tabernacle at Church Walcot, t'other side of the border—at least, so she said. So pardon my irritability," he repeated, and spoke at long intervals, tears filling his eyes the while. "My poor old nerves are—utterly shattered by the agonies I have undergone and am—now undergoing. The doctor and minister have been with me—about a—a will ; but no will is required. You shall have all, Dick—heritable and movable—all—all—and old Prue agrees with me that there is no use in addling my poor head with lawyer's rubbish."

After this he seemed to sink fast, for the village doctor had utterly failed in all his art, by the application of blisters and so forth, to confine the gout to the feet. He became so very faint that I hurried away in search of Mrs. Grubb, for whom I had thrice rung the bell without obtaining the least attention.

I found her preparing to enjoy a luxurious luncheon in her own room, where, unlike my much-neglected chamber, there were the perfumes of flowers and fresh air, with the songs of birds coming through the open window ; and there, seated on the softest of sofas, sat the shepherd of the Tabernacle, a pale, thin, cadaverous, and red-nosed man, with a great gingham umbrella beside him, and a glass of brandy and water in his hand.

"Will you attend to your master, Mrs. Grubb?" said I sternly, for I had an intuitive dislike of the woman.

"Master, indeed—" she was beginning, impertinently.

"When you have quite done praying, perhaps you will be pleased to attend to his bell."

"Praying, young sir," began the shepherd, in a drawling

tone ; "we were but craving a humble blessing for the food which heaven in its goodness giveth us."

"Unlike you," added Mrs. Grubb, lifting her stealthy eyes to the ceiling, "we never break bread without thanking the heavenly donor."

"Bah ! My poor uncle is sinking fast—I don't think he can live an hour."

"If my humble ministrations can smooth the way," began the shepherd ; but he almost choked himself by the haste in which he swallowed his jorum of stiff grog, while Mrs. Grubb covered her face with her handkerchief "to hide the tears she did *not* shed," and hurried from the room in what appeared a very well-acted paroxysm of grief.

Incidents followed each other fast after this. Though he rallied a little, ere a month was past poor old Uncle Hab fell into a state of coma, and died in my arms one evening about sunset.

Old Toby Haywood came specially over to give me all his advice and assistance, and the funeral was to follow in four days, in our family burial place under the old towers of St. Mary of Kelso.

As the time for this closing scene drew near, Mrs. Grubb seemed to grow more and more inconsolable, and I began to fear that I had really misjudged the selfishness of her character, and, acting on a remark of Captain Haywood's, who was completely deluded by her, I patted her kindly on the shoulder, and told her that "for her long and faithful services she was yet to consider Haddonrig as her home ; for, of course," I added, "as my poor Uncle Hab has died without a will, all, you know, is mine."

"Indeed !" said she suddenly, looking me fully, boldly, and defiantly in the face ; "but your uncle, if he died without a will, has left a certain domestic ingredient in the family you little dream of, but one that may prove very disagreeable to you."

"What the deuce do you mean ?" I asked, astonished by the change in her tone and bearing.



"Swearing so near the dead man's coffin ! It is like you, profligate."

"Mrs. Grubb—"

"Mrs. Halbert Haddon, if you please."

"A wife !"

"Yes—a wife," she replied, mimicking my tone.

"When—what—where—who ?" spluttered Toby Haywood.

"Me—I, Prudence Haddon, legally and lawfully his wedded wife."

"Wedded by whom, and where ?" I asked, truly aghast at her cool effrontery.

"By Mr. Flewker, at Church Walcot."

I was utterly bewildered and struck dumb by these circumstantial details. Old Toby Haywood swore that the whole affair was a fabrication—a falsehood—and rode over to Church Walcot, where he was shown the marriage register, and had an interview with Mr. Flewker and his clerk, both of whom set the stubborn fact of the espousal beyond a doubt.

Mr. Flewker arrived at Haddonrig with a certified extract from the marriage register, and with his own private duplicate, in which the event was duly recorded. He at once knew Prudence Grubb as the bride, but utterly failed to recognise the man who married her in the poor pale corpse that lay in its silver mounted coffin.

However, he fully identified my uncle Halbert's well-known suit of clothes—the blue coat with the brass buttons, the ample white waistcoat, corded breeches, and yellow-topped boots, the hat and cane, as having been all used by the bridegroom on the marriage day at Church Walcot.

I added to the bewilderment of all by foolishly admitting that, on the evening of the day in question, I had seen a figure in the twilight which closely resembled that of my uncle, but thinner, taller, and somewhat ungainly.

The date so recent, barely three months ago, when all knew that my uncle was fettered to his deathbed by illness, puzzled us all extremely.

"It is a strange case," said Toby. "There are no fools

like old ones, and this Prudence Grubb has been an artful huzzy. She may have got to windward of my old friend somehow ; and if the worst comes to the worst, you must pay her her widow's share, and turn her out of doors."

But the worst had not come, for the funeral was barely over when Mrs. Prudence, who had donned a most effective suit of weeds, announced that she was about to increase the number of Her Majesty's lieges, by presenting a posthumous heir or heiress to the estates of my late uncle ; and that she was thus full mistress of Haddonrig.

I lost all temper then, and openly charging her with felony and conspiracy, applied to the procurator fiscal for the county.

The fact of a marriage having taken place—the lines with a signature so closely like my uncle's, that Sharkeigh must have practised it well and often—the register, and so forth, were all gone thoroughly and legally into.

The landlady of the Walcot Arms was precognosed as to the conversation she had overheard while seated within her bar ; my uncle's servants were questioned and cross-questioned as to whether he had left the house or even his bed on the day in question.

The lawyers were likely to make a fine affair of it, for agents and counsel were fee'd on both sides ; and as my leave of absence was nearly expiring I was hovering on the verge of monetary ruin, for my late uncle's funds were arrested in the hands of his factor for the behoof of the widow and her expected bantling. So Clarice and I saw our hopes shattered, and our golden dreams passing away like mist in the sunshine.

I shall never forget the scowl, so triumphant, so full of malicious exultation and vulgar assurance, with which the successful impostor greeted me when, portmanteau in hand, I descended for the last time the staircase of my uncle's house—the house which was mine, mine by the right of inheritance—and issued from the avenue with barely enough in my purse to take me to Walcot Tower.

I have little more to tell you, Gerard ; and perhaps you may think my story has already been long enough.

Though many averred that she was somewhat overripe in years for such an event, Mrs. Grubb produced a baby heir to the lands of Haddonrig—a black-haired little imp, I believe, and most unlike my uncle : but ere this all my affairs had come to grief.

I had no money wherewith to effect an exchange, and at the same time to satisfy my creditors, so there was nothing left for me but to sell out, and my fatal papers were posted to the Horse Guards.

When I first came to know that I must quit the service I was cut to the very soul. I had no ideas, hopes, or feelings but those of a soldier ; no other sentiment blended with my life or its aspirations save my love for Clarice, and now, without winning her and Haddonrig, I had to give up the splendid and happy mess, my jovial friends the Fusiliers, with all their memories and associations, and in my six and twentieth year to be cast upon the world without a penny, and, what was worse, without a profession—to leave a dashing regiment—a career of which you know well I was so proud—and to sink, after two Indian campaigns, into hopeless and aimless obscurity—to become, it might be, a gentleman jockey or a billiard-marker.

Crushed, as it were, upon the very threshold of life, by a dark, an undeserved, and terrible reverse, the words of *Othello's* farewell seemed ever on my tongue—

“Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars  
That make ambition virtue ! O, farewell !  
Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,  
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,  
The royal banner, and all quality,  
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war !”

Relinquishing all these, and, more than all, my Clarice—my sweet young love, who clung to me as one in despair when we parted—I can see her still in memory, Douglas, with all her brown-golden hair, her morning dress of white muslin, trimmed with blue ribbons, her bright hazel eyes, and looking so fresh and charming—relinquishing even her, I say, I had to become a civilian, without prospects or means to begin the new and vague career to which all my habits and instincts

were hostile—to do something for my daily bread—yet I knew not what that something should be.

Times there were when I thought of enlisting, but shrank from following where I had led—from being commanded where I had held command.

In this state of doubt, Gerard, I found myself in London, where it seemed to me that there was not, amid its vast world, a more hopeless wretch than Dick Haddon.

But I was then, as I have said, only six and twenty, so thank heaven, I took heart again, though that heart bled for my lost Clarice. I thought of trying my fortune at the diggings. I had heard of many who in an incredibly short space of time had amassed vast wealth in that field for the desperate and adventurous.

An old brother officer kindly advanced me the means, and I sailed for Australia ; but the ship foundered at sea in the South Atlantic, twenty miles from Saldanha Bay. Luckily I was one of the few who escaped in a boat and reached the western coast of our Cape Colony.

There, with the few remaining sovereigns I possessed, I bought a waggon, a team of oxen, and rifles, engaged old Adrian Africander as my factotum, and became what you find me now, Gerard—a Caffre trader.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“YOUR story is a strange one,” said Douglas, after a pause ; “but were there no means of proving fully and satisfactorily who the rascal was that passed himself off as your uncle Richard in this sham marriage at Walcot?”

“No other means than those I have mentioned, and our evidence was deemed barely circumstantial, though an infant was missing in a neighbouring county about the time of the alleged heir’s appearance. So thus I lost Clarice and my position, while that woman—that confounded old catamaran, Grubb—remained in possession. Mark Sharkeigh, as I have told you, was nowhere to be found, and he alone could have disproved the story.”

"By criminating himself."

"Exactly, and that he was neither bound nor likely to do ; but, since my separation from Clarice, how often have I thought that 'Death and absence differ but in name.' I have, of course, lost her for ever—the first and only girl I ever loved—yet I have learned to be, if not happy, at least content and industrious. I need not rehearse to you the misery of our hopeless parting before I set out for London."

"You corresponded for a time, I believe?"

"Yes ; but I sank lower and lower in fortune and in prospects, and then, somehow, our letters ceased. The learned tell us that our bodies, bone, muscle, and flesh, are renewed every seven years. Would that every seventh year we could start with mind and hope, enthusiasm and passions, fresh again. I would gladly ignore my past periods—even existence—in every sense."

"Clarice Haywood included?"

"No, Gerard. There I own my theory at fault. I would shrink from committing her memory to oblivion. Yet to what end do I brood over and cherish it? She may now be the wife of another—the mother, perhaps, of his children."

Douglas uttered a chuckling laugh, so strange, at this gloomy remark, that I stirred up the embers with the branch of a pine tree and stared at him.

"And so, in this hopeless fashion, you parted, before old Toby's death at Walcot?" he resumed, after a pause.

"Alas, yes."

"And have never met since, I understand?"

"Never! How could we meet, circumstanced as I was? Thus, as I say, I know not whether she be wedded or single, alive or dead—"

"She is alive and well, thank heaven!"

"And single?"

"Yes, old fellow—at least, she was single a few weeks ago. She is here—here, in this precious Cape Colony—with her sister Fanny—Mrs. Carysfort, I mean. So you are a happier man than I, Dick Haddon, for you have still your chances, while mine are gone—gone for ever."

"Clarice Haywood here, say you?" I exclaimed, starting up.

"Precisely," replied Douglas, quietly lighting a fresh cigar; "and now I think that things are about to mend, perhaps, and that Fortune has played her worst tricks with you."

"But why—how—here?" I asked, in utter bewilderment.

"Where could the poor girl go, or with whom, after her father's death, and the loss of Walcot by the entail—all but a little pittance—but with her married sister, Mrs. Carysfort?"

I was speechless for a time. At last I said mechanically—

"Her married sister?"

"You know, no doubt, how my affair went with Fanny Haywood?" said Douglas, with some irritability of manner.

"Impossible. I had left England before your return home," said I gently.

"Ah, true. One knocks about the world so fast now that one is apt to forget many things. That fellow, Carysfort, a handsome but coldblooded and insinuating dog, he was my marplot—my *bête noire*."

"Carysfort? I remember that the last letter I had from Clarice, just before I sailed, a gloomy and crest-fallen steerage passenger, from London, mentioned that a Captain Carysfort had rented some shootings on the moor adjacent to Walcot Tower."

"Exactly—Chandos Carysfort, of the Royal Welsh. He's a major on the staff now, and with the era of his 'shooting' comes the darker portion of my story. While you were at home, you knew, of course, all about my three years' engagement with Fanny—though a mere girl, and too young, perhaps, to be judged severely—a golden-haired and blue-eyed little flirt and jilt as heaven ever created."

"I heard it spoken of, of course, among the Haywood family and their circle."

"I came home on leave from Malta to fulfil that engagement, but found every reason to fear that Fanny had ceased to love me—she whom I thought was to be, of all women in the world, my fate. Well, Fanny, though beautiful enough

for me, was not like the heroine of a novel—perfection and insipidity. She was wonderfully *piquante* and attractive, sharp and brilliant, yet very far from perfect. Carysfort had been about Walcot for some four months, and I, to use a slang phrase, found myself ‘nowhere.’ And yet I loved her,” continued this big, burly, and moustached soldier, with a sudden gust of emotion, as his eyes filled and his lips trembled; “heaven knows how I loved her, Dick. Year by year the deep tenderness—that deep tenderness that filled my heart—seemed also to have inspired hers, and little could I then have thought that a time for disgust and hopeless separation would come.”

“When did you first begin to perceive that this fellow, Carysfort, had an undue influence over Fanny—beyond yours, I mean?”

“From the moment of my arrival. She had then begun to sing his songs in lieu of those I admired, and to study his tastes in place of mine. Once, I remember, he admired scarlet-striped piqués in lieu of blue, which became her complexion best, and, by Jove, she wore scarlet ever after. Another time he admired mauve, and she was for a week or two an eruption of mauve ribbons and gloves. All had been fair and square between us, Dick, till this insinuating fellow got an introduction to Walcot Tower, and in my absence too, and then all was over with him, though I had a firm ally in old Captain Haywood, and another in Clarice, who possesses a strength of character unknown to her sister.

“Fanny, a flirt, a coquette by nature, was so weak and unstable that a lover absent, however tender and true, and however solemnly betrothed, had no chance whatever with an admirer, a mere dangler present; and yet I loved her, honestly, earnestly, devotedly loved her. But when hints fed my growing suspicions—hints which were too readily given me by the idle and the mischievous—of their long rides and secluded rambles by Wooler and Flodden-field, by Thirlmoor and Otterburn, their evening walks and open philanders, coupled with the too-evident constraint and confusion of our

first meeting—constraint on her side I mean, with pique and mortification on mine—I left her to Carysfort, resigned my leave, and rejoined the depôt of ours in disgust. He cut in and won her, and I have been a lonely, sulky fellow ever since.”

“You parted in anger, then?”

“Yes—actually in vulgar anger. One day I called him a snob to her face, on which she burst into a fit of laughter, and said—

“‘Don’t talk to me of Captain Carysfort. The man is a snob—to repeat your coarse but excellent phrase—one who parts his hair in the middle and bandolines his moustache; but, don’t be afraid, my poor Gerard, that though I dance with him, ride with him, walk and talk, waltz and flirt with him, I shall marry him.’

“‘You are at perfect liberty, so far as I am concerned, to wind up by doing so, if you please,’ said I.

“And then we parted, never to meet again, as I thought. But, lo ! on our landing at Cape Town, whom did I see first among the spectators on horseback but Mrs. Carysfort and her husband the Major, both of whom bowed and smiled to me very affably—just as pleasantly as if we had parted yesterday the best of friends instead of in red-hot anger, two years ago, and far away in England. Deuced cool that, wasn’t it, Dick? But there too was Clarice, mounted on a bay horse, with a white hat and blue veil, and a white holland riding-habit braided with blue, showing off her fine figure to perfection. She was looking bright, beautiful, and handsome as ever she did at home among the heathery hills and breezy glens of her native Northumberland, and her soft hazel eyes were filled with tears as I shook her hand, for there came over her too evidently thoughts of home and the past—”

“Of *me*, perhaps?”

“I doubt it not, old fellow. They all swelled up in her affectionate heart on seeing an old friend. I could not, for the lie of me, take the hand of Fanny or of her husband, for there was a choking sensation in my throat, and an angry



fury in my heart conflicting with something of my old love for her—the love that has never been replaced—and touching my cap, I pushed on past Carysfort at the head of my company. What else could a fellow do?” added poor Douglas, as he took a vicious puff of his cigar, and tossed the fag-end of it into our sinking watch-fire.

Then he started and laid his hand on his sword when hearing a rustling sound in the bush close by, and seeing me cock my rifle.

I levelled and fired.

“What do you see?” he exclaimed. “A Caffre?”

“Only a bush-bok—an antelope—at the foot of that mimosa tree,” said I, while dragging forward by the hind legs the handsome little animal, which I had hit in the head. It was about two feet long, with erect and spiral horns of twelve inches, and skin of a brilliant chestnut brown.

“You’ve alarmed my sentries by firing in their rear,” said Douglas, laughing.

“Egad, so I have!” said I, as this trifling incident brought our whole little camp under arms for a few minutes, and the wild, dark visage of Adrian Africander was visible as he peered from the covered waggon, with his double-barrelled rifle at full-cock, and his shaggy black hair hanging over his gleaming eyes.

Late though the hour, Douglas and I had so much to say that we were loth to part yet.

“A strange coincidence it is, Dick,” said he, “that we should both have been in love with the same sisters, and both unlucky in our circumstances with them.”

“But from very different causes. However, as Thackeray says, ‘The whole world throbs with vain heart-pangs, and tosses and heaves with longings and unfulfilled desires,’ so if this is the case, why should we be different from the rest, Gerard? If Clarice still loves me—”

“If!” interrupted Douglas, with some bitterness of manner. “It is one of the smallest and yet most important words in the English language. But this I may tell you, that Cla-

rice Haywood never spoke of you without a deep interest—an emotion which she could not conceal.”

“Heaven bless her ! But I implore you, Douglas, not to fan anew the embers of hope—hope that had died out, as I thought, for ever. She may have changed since those pleasant days in old Northumberland.”

“True. Carysfort is on the staff, and, being always in and about head-quarters and Government House, is considered ‘first chop’ here, so the ladies of his family—”

“You mean Clarice and Mrs. Carysfort.”

“Of course, being young and pretty women, they have no end of dangles about them.”

This information stung me a little. I sighed, and after a pause, said,

“And has Clarice had no proposals since—since—”

“Your days? I know not.”

“She, with all her beauty—”

“You forget that, save once at Colchester, once at the Curragh, and at Aldershot, I have never heard of the sisters, and that until the day we landed here I have never seen them since we parted so gloomily at Walcot.”

“Has Clarice, then, no admirers !”

“She has many. I heard our mess speak pretty pointedly of one for certain.”

“One ?”

“I am wrong, perhaps, in admitting it.”

“Nay, nay ; she knows not even of my existence now, so I have no claim on Clarice—but this one—”

“Has been pretty constant in his attentions ever since—”

“Since when ?” I asked impetuously.

“Well, since the Carysforts came out here some months ago.”

“Who is he ?”

“The general’s extra aide-de-camp.”

“What’s his infernal name ?” I asked, gnawing my moustache.

“There ! I knew I was wrong to speak of him, Dick.”

"Percival Graves, a lieutenant of the Coldstream Guards, who came out here on the staff, as he said, 'to see what fun was going on in Caffreland.'"

"What kind of man is he?"

"Young, handsome, and rich, too—his father has no end of property in the midland counties somewhere—but, so far as his dangling goes, I don't think there's anything in it."

"How can you possibly know?" I asked sulkily.

"True; but now we must positively tuck ourselves in, Dick, for forty winks ere we quit this pleasant locality of Hell's Kloof."

I dragged a bundle of skins—the spoil of my rifle—from the waggon, and under these we coiled ourselves away for the night, or rather what remained of the morning.

I strove hard to sleep, for a long and exciting day of travelling in hot haste, with a pursuit, a conflict, and most unexpected rescue at the hands of Douglas from Mark Graaf and his mixed band of Caffres and bush convicts, had preceded our halt in the Kloof; but sleep was long of coming, I had so much to think of. "Deferred hope is heart-sickness to all manner of men—to a lover, deferred hope is akin to despair."

Now I had survived all that. Hope had utterly passed away, and I had learned to be content. I had lived on in a new world—a new species of existence—and schooled myself to think of Clarice Haywood as a portion of the past, of a life that would return no more; but now Douglas had brought all the past in one wild gush back upon my heart.

Clarice was here—here in the Cape Colony!

Here had she been for many months while I was wandering far away in the wild bush, and now a hundred—yea, a thousand—dim foreshadowings of the future that might be possible floated before me, killing sleep.

The familiar sounds of the African forest—familiar at least to me—the whirr of a passing night-bird, the melancholy and prolonged howl of a prowling jackal, the occasional voices of the Highland sentinels as they kept each other on the alert—all lingered drowsily in my ear; but beyond all there was the

stinging consciousness that Clarice knew not, or thought not of me, and had a lover—this “young, rich, and handsome” Percival Graves, whom I had already learned to detest.

“Shall I ever win her?” thought I again and again, and at last I slept, with my loaded rifle beside me, for five years now nearly my inseparable companion.

## CHAPTER IX.

FROM a dream of Walcot Tower and of the quaint little room I used to occupy when there—a room decorated with many a drawing by Clarice—and where I could lie abed in the pleasant mornings and hear the chimes in the distant village spire, the birds twittering in the sunshine, and where I could even venture forth in my dressing-gown to smoke a cigar or pick up a ripe nectarine, or to inhale the sweet air that came from the purple moors on one hand, or the blue Cheviot mountains on the other—from a dream of that little chamber wherein I had made many a careful toilette in anticipation of meeting the blooming Haywood girls, the soft-eyed Clarice and the golden-haired hoyden Fanny, at breakfast—I was roughly roused by Mac Gillivray, the piper of Douglas’s party, making the rocks and dingles of Hell’s Kloof reecho as he blew the warning for the march towards the Amatolas—prior to which however, a hasty meal was prepared.

Assisted by my faithful retainer, Adrain Africander, pots of hot coffee were soon prepared and distributed in the tin canteens : and with these and a ration biscuit per man the Highlanders made their morning meal.

My team of oxen were then traced to the waggon, and we prepared to leave the Kloof, after burying in a hole some half-dozen of dead Caffres who lay shot in the bush, and over whose remains the hungry crows were hovering in the pine trees.

“Do we part here?” asked Douglas, as we exchanged our cigar-cases for a morning weed ; “part as suddenly as we have met?”

“By no means, Gerard. I was making my way towards

Port Elizabeth, on the shore of Algoa Bay, as I have a considerable quantity—about two hundred pounds' worth—of ivory, aloes, skins, and ostrich feathers to dispose of. But I shall get rid of the entire stock at Graham's Town, and from thence I shall be your guide to the Amatolas. Trading is over, and war is the word now."

"Will you come into camp, then?" asked Douglas with a kindling eye.

"I shall—yes. I'll join you as a volunteer, or anything you choose."

"Bravo! There are many of 'Ours' who must remember you at Malta and Old Gib, and they will give you a hearty welcome, Dick."

"My position will be rather an anomalous one."

"Not at all; but how far is Graham's Town from here?"

"About twenty-five miles."

"We shall be there to-morrow."

"And I shall introduce you to a delightful old Dutch herr, with a most popular young barmaid."

In my waggon I placed two of Douglas's soldiers, Privates Robert Bruce and Donald Farquharson, who had "broken down" on the march under heat, exhaustion, and the weight of their accoutrements.

He mounted me on his spare horse, and we set forth about seven on a cool, delicious May morning, taking an eastern direction, to strike upon the main road that leads from Bedford to Graham's Town.

I could soon perceive that Douglas had an admirable mode of comporting himself to his soldiers, with whom he seemed an especial favourite.

He rode alongside the marching party, with whom he conversed from time to time, with a tone and bearing of comradeship that knit the men to him, without loosening in the least the bonds of discipline, for he was a strict hand at all times, and kept every man under him to his duty.

For some miles of the way we had the piper playing, and the echoes of his wild and piercing instrument scared the

monkeys in many a thicket of pine and mimosa trees, and once or twice a spotted tiger crossed our line of march, swift as a flash of lightning, when hounded from one jungle or clump of bushes to another.

"Your pipes, I repeat to you, Gerard, were a most welcome sound to me last night," said I. "By Jove! I never thought ever to hear them thus in the wilds of Southern Africa."

"In what part of the world, where blood has been shed and battles won, have our pipes not been heard?" said Douglas, with something of fiery enthusiasm in his manner. "I have often reflected that there is something alike strange in the antiquity and association of the pipe-music played by our Scottish regiments. To the English and foreign ear it sounds, I doubt not, but as a concatenation of barbarous sounds; yet that very air that Mac Gillivray has been playing before us just now—'Righ Alisdair'—must have been heard by King Alexander seven hundred years ago, and may be old, perhaps, as the days of Macbeth. And is it not odd, in this age of progress and paper-collars, to hear at Aldershot, at the Curragh of Kildare, and elsewhere, our regimental pipers summoning the Scottish corps by the same music with which Bruce marched his men to Bannockburn—by which Black Donald led his Islesmen to Harlow, and the Jacobite clans to many a battle against the House of Hanover? But now that Mac Gillivray is out of wind, I shall strike up a song, and you, my lads, shall give the chorus."

The soldiers clapped their hands as they slung their rifles, for all were now marching at ease, and Douglas sung a long ditty, of which I can remember but a few lines:—

"Jack spent all, then borrowed at twenty per cent.,  
His mistress fought shy when his money was spent;  
So he went for a soldier—he couldn't do less—  
And left his fair Fanny to hug old Brown Bess.  
'Halt!' 'Wheel into line!' and 'Attention—eyes right!'  
Put Bacchus and Venus and Momus to flight;  
But who can depict half the sorrows he felt,  
When he dyed his moustaches and pipeplayed his belt?"

After a time we all became silent enough, for the kind of path we traversed now was rough, and at times deep. We

crossed more than one small river by a drift or ford, and pushed on over slopes studded by scattered mimosas and gigantic white thorns. Once we traversed a high hill, completely covered with African aloes, where the ascent was so steep that the Highlanders had to put their shoulders to the wheels of my waggon, or its team of fourteen oxen, even lashed to frenzy as they were by Adrian's long whip, or jam-bok, of white rhinoceros hide, would have failed to drag it upward.

In some places the track was lost amid soft sand, where we sank ankle deep; but I knew the natural features of the country well, and assured Douglas that within fifteen miles from the place of our starting, I should bring him and his party to a snug little *poort*, or green, grassy hollow, where we might halt safely for the night.

I knew the place well, having there once brought down an elephant with a gun which was slung at the back of my waggon—one of large calibre, fashioned for such sport, and throwing balls of which four go to the pound.

Thrice we passed some naked Fingoes—tall, lithe, and active-looking savages—armed, as usual, with muskets and assegais, their felt hats ornamented with plumage of the ostrich, or the Caffre crane, and the brush of the jackal, and having at their waists, suspended from steel hooks of their own manufacture, a large bag made without a seam from the skin of the wild cat. In these pouches they carried their tobacco, their *iquako* or snuff-box, their food, and sometimes ammunition, while on the outside were stuck a knife and spoon of metal.

These warned us in their guttural dialect that numerous parties of Caffres under Macomo, and rebel Hottentots—many of the latter being deserters from the Cape Mounted Rifles, with some half-caste Boors under Mark Graaff—were in motion in the bush, and numerous enough to cut us off to a man.

"Mark Graaff! Is not that the fellow I saved you from last night?" said Douglas.

"The same scoundrel. He has been on my trail ever since

I set out from Zwagens Hoek, more than sixty miles from this, on my homeward journey to the coast. I hope to have the fellow covered by my rifle yet, and if I can get him within eight hundred yards, may heaven help him."

This was, as Douglas said, "lively intelligence" for our little party to receive in the wild and open bush, far from succour, and the men looked blankly yet resolutely in each other's faces as they pushed on with scorched and blistered lips, for the sun was fierce and hot now, and in their hearts they were well inclined to anathematise a war in which much toil must necessarily be undergone, and many brave lives lost without honour being won, for the Caffre contest was one of those petty strifes of which John Bull makes no account at home.

Only once did we pass anything like a human habitation—a house and cattle kraal, once the dwelling of a Dutch farmer and ex-field cornet, by whose table I had more than once enjoyed a meerschaum. It stood in an open place, enclosed by stockades, and its windows appeared to be all barricaded with bags, boxes, and barrels filled with sand—impromptu fascines—and its walls were loopholed; but whether it had been attacked we knew not, for it was empty now, and abandoned to the snakes and crows.

"Push on, my man," said I to a Highlander, who was beginning to lag a little. "To drop to the rear here is only to court assassination."

"A knapsack, havresack, and blanket, with sixty rounds of ammunition, are a hard load on a long march, sir," replied the soldier; "but a sad heart is the heaviest load of all."

"Is this your case?" I asked.

"I've left my poor wife and three bit bairnies behind me at Cape Town, and heaven only kens if I shall ever see them mair."

"By Jove, Gerard, this fellow's case is worse than ours."

"He is sad when he thinks of his own wife, and I am so when I think of the wife of another," replied Douglas, in a cynical tone; but I observed that the soldier I had spoken to looked crushed and abstracted in manner, as if a foreboding of coming evil haunted him.



The sun was setting beyond the range of hills that rise between Albany and Uitenhagen, when we reached the *poort* or glen, a lonely and most lovely little spot, where a small but deep stream flowed, and our thirsty soldiers greeted it with a shout of rapture as they threw themselves beside it and filled their canteens.

Around this sequestered hollow were groves of orange trees, covered with ripe golden fruit from their highest to their lowest branches, which were bent to the sward beneath the juicy load. Of this fruit we all partook freely, and found many fine bananas growing among the trees, where the dense undergrowth was full of buzzing insect life.

Arms were piled, a fire lighted for cooking, our horses were knee-haltered, and my team of oxen were untraced to graze by Adrian Africander.

Douglas and I reconnoitred the locality. The stream protected us from approach on one side and a ridge of rocks upon the other. On the summit of this ridge we posted one sentinel, a second was placed in advance at the head of the ravine, and a third in our rear at the lower end, so that no one could approach us unseen or without being fired on. The night closed quietly in, the shadows deepened in the orange groves, and the soldiers lay down to sleep under the branches with their greatcoats and blankets only as protection from the dew, for the party were without a single tent, or the means of conveying it.

After a glass of brandy and water and a pipe of cavendish, Douglas had partaken himself to roost on one shaft of my waggon, and I was seated on the other, lost in thought of Clarice and all that Douglas had told me yesterday, but watching the first segment of the moon as it rose, broad, vast, and yellow above the opposite side of the glen, the outline of which stood darkly defined against the sky about a quarter of a mile distant.

Up, up she rose, the queen of night, to pour a flood of bright radiance upon the little stream and the orange trees, with all their globes of golden fruit; but about the moment when her disc, round, luminous, and vast, like a harvest moon at

home, but singularly ruddy and fiery in hue, was clear of the ridge, we suddenly saw the figure of a man, armed with a long gun, and wearing a Fingo hat, appear in strong and dark outline against the shining circle.

Looming thus between us and the light, his figure appeared gigantic, and we had not the least doubt of his being a Caffre scout, who was looking steadily and observantly down upon our bivouack, all unaware that his figure was so distinctly revealed to us by the moon disc behind him.

The effect of this dark and silent figure was very singular, as he stood motionless and leaning on his gun, until the moon rose skyward clear of the ridge, and no farther trace of him could be seen.

"I am certain we might have potted that fellow," said Douglas. "He was not above six hundred yards distant."

"But we are uncertain of his character. He did not seem to be a naked savage," said I.

"True; but the Dutch boors are as much our enemies as the Caffres themselves."

This little episode, coupled with the advices of the Fingoes we had met, gave Douglas and me an unpleasant impression of insecurity, and doubts of how the night might pass. He ordered his party to load and cap their rifles, and visited his three sentinels, whom he changed every hour, to urge upon them the necessity of exerting the utmost vigilance, lest we might be stolen upon and all butchered in cold blood, and in such a fashion as savages alone could conceive and execute.

"This kind of work is somewhat more exciting than mounted guard on an English barrack of orthodox brick—the national colour, red, faced with white corners," said Douglas, as he filled his pipe again, and handed me his tobacco-pouch.

"Yes," I replied, "or the daily routine and stupidity of the sham camp at Aldershott, with its dust and sunshine in that infernal Long Valley, that all the Line know so well about; and then at night the monotonous click of billiard-balls in the gaming hut, and the silly laughter from the open windows of the messrooms—eh?"

"Yes ; but one misses the messroom here, Dick," said Douglas, laughing ; "and though out of the service, you still retain a soldier's privilege."

"To grumble?"

"Yes. A shot, by heavens !" exclaimed Douglas, starting up, sword in hand, as the crack of a rifle rang at the lower end of the ravine, and we saw its light smoke curling away upward in the moonlight. "Stand to your arms, men ! Fall in, and fix bayonets !"

## CHAPTER X.

WE never doubted but that the Caffres were upon us ; and even Farquharson and Bruce, the two sick soldiers, tottered out of the waggon with their rifles, intent on selling their lives as dearly as possible, while the piper, Mac Gillivray, armed himself with one of my double-barrelled pieces, and Adrian Africander ground his sharp teeth with savage fury as he put a fresh cap upon my elephant gun, as being the most deadly weapon he could wield.

With our revolvers cocked, Douglas and I hastened to the place where the shot had been heard, and the smoke seen to curl upward in the moonlight.

Our sentinel, who had been posted in the open portion of the ravine, was lying there on his back, stone dead.

His forage-cap, with its circle of Scotch chequer, had fallen, and already his jaw had become relaxed and his face livid. A ball had pierced his heart, and now over the breast of his coarse blue blouse and his white pipeclayed shoulder-belt the blood was slowly oozing in a small dark streak.

He proved to be the same man to whom I had spoken on the march ; so the poor fellow's sad presentiment had soon been fulfilled.

We looked blankly in each other's faces, and searched all the bush in the vicinity of this terrible episode, the soldiers driving their bayonets into the masses of jungle and raising therefrom clouds of insects ; but no trace of a hostile Caffre or lurking Hottentot could be found.

"Can he have shot himself?" suggested Burns, the sergeant, a grave-eyed and hard-featured Scot.

"No," replied a soldier; "the poor fellow's rifle is loaded and capped."

"Post the next man for duty, Burns, and let him keep a sharp look-out; the safety of his own life and all our lives may depend upon his doing so," said Douglas emphatically.

And leaving another soldier on this perilous post, with instructions to watch well the open portion of the ravine, to remain steadily on his own ground and not to walk about, but to listen attentively to every sound, even the stirring of a leaf, we left him, and bore with us the body of the man who had just fallen.

"It must be that which a writer terms 'the thirst to kill that lies innate in humanity,' which inspires those Caffre brutes," said Douglas; "but for that, we might feel quite secure here under these lovely orange trees."

We, of course, connected this event with the figure which we saw so strangely and picturesquely against the disc of the rising moon; and a great emotion of uneasiness and doubt stole over the whole party. The Highlanders retained their rifles in their hands, and lingered about the vicinity of my waggon, smoking their pipes, and breaking the long pauses in their conversation by surmises as to "what the deuce would turn up next."

But we were not kept long in suspense.

Another shot, followed by a shrill cry, broke the silence of the kloof, "piercing the night's dull ear," and giving us all a species of electric shock.

Again we rushed to the spot, and there lay our second sentinel on his back, writhing apparently in mortal agony. His cap had also fallen off, a bullet had pierced his throat, from the double wounds in which—it had passed clean through—and from his mouth, the blood was pouring in torrents. His tongue, which we eventually found to be frightfully lacerated about the root, was lolled forth amid foam and bloody saliva, distending fast to a terrible and unnatural size, while his eye-

balls were starting from their sockets, and protruding horribly in the moonlight.

A fierce malediction escaped Douglas, and was echoed by all his men on beholding this appalling sight. We were without a surgeon ; and knowing nothing of the nature of the wound, or how to stop the hæmorrhage, were totally without the means of alleviating his sufferings, which were terrible, and excited the commiseration of all.

We took off his accoutrements, opened his blouse, and removed him to my waggon, where a bed was made for him of the softest skins I possessed ; but there he expired in our hands, almost before Douglas had time to post a third sentinel, which he only did after a long and careful search about the rocks and trees, and bravely standing in many places conspicuously in the moonlight, as if to court a ball from the lurker, that by drawing his fire we might discover his secret hiding-place. The third sentinel was a resolute fellow, and took his post fearlessly. He stood with ears and eyes strained, and kept his rifle at full cock, ready to fire on any object, or at any alarm, however trivial, that stirred near him ; but he had not been left by himself for ten minutes when he uttered a cry of pain, and we heard the explosion of two rifles.

The man was seated on the ground when we gathered about him. A ball had fractured his left leg above the knee-joint, and his rifle had been discharged harmless as he sank beneath the shot.

"But where did it come from— did you see?" asked Douglas impetuously.

"I can't say, sir," moaned the sufferer through his teeth. "I heard a jackal howl in the bush, and turned to the left for a moment. Then I heard the firing of a rifle as my leg snapt under me."

"To the left ! So, then, the shot must come from the right," said Douglas.

"Carry him to my waggon. I can bind the wound up, and to-morrow we shall reach Graham's Town," said I.

"By heavens, the waggon will soon be filled with killed

and wounded men, if this infernal work continues !" exclaimed Douglas, as he proceeded, in rage and commiseration, to search the locality for a third time, but in vain.

I soon dressed the wound temporarily ; for in the bush I had won considerable experience of gunshot scars, bites, cuts, and slashes. I gave the sufferer some brandy and water, left him in my waggon, attended by his comrades, and rejoined Douglas.

" There is at least one savage lurking somewhere near us," said I ; " and as I know something of the ways of these Bushmen, you must leave me to draw the cover. I shall be your fourth sentinel here in the open part of the kloof."

" I was about to take that duty on myself."

" You have your men to lead ; I am without care or responsibility. I have not a soul in the world to regret me."

" But if you should fall, Dick?"

" Then I bequeath to you the contents of my purse and hunting-pouch, Gerard—remember that—to bury them with me in the bush," said I, with something between a sigh and a laugh in my throat.

" It is a terrible risk—a mere chance you have for life. Even now the scoundrel's rifle may be covering us both."

" True ; but remember that, ' when chances become desperate, a desperate chance often wins,' and we must unearth and kill this fellow."

I quickly took up the rifles of the three men who had fallen, piled them in a pyramid by locking the ramrods together ; over them I threw a greatcoat and placed on the top a Highland bonnet ; and leaving this dummy figure in a shady place under the trees, Douglas and I returned to the main body of our party, who seemed to consider my waggon their rallying point or headquarters.

Returning by a *détour*, crawling on my hands and knees, with my rifle and revolver carefully capped anew, I drew close to the place where the blood of our three poor fellows was still visible on the grass.

The moon was waning now, and all was still—so still that I

could hear the dew plash heavily as it fell from some over-charged leaf on the grass below.

On I crept softly, and, as I flattered myself, unseen, beyond the spot where my mock sentinel stood ; for I knew that the shots must have come from some place a little way down the ravine, and to the right of the sentinel's post.

I remained in shadow, and concealed among the jungle-grass, with my drawn hunting-knife in my teeth, as I knew not the moment I might find myself within arm's length of some active and athletic savage, lurking in the bush, and then a hand-to-hand conflict for life or death was certain to ensue.

At last I found myself close to a natural object in the ravine—a feature which we had overlooked in our first reconnaissance, or of which Douglas, having newly arrived in the country, knew not the precise nature—and my heart beat so wildly that I could scarcely breathe, for it seemed that now this deadly mystery was about to be solved.

In fact, I found my progress suddenly impeded by one of those vast decayed boulders or hollow blocks which are so common among the hills of South Africa, and which, by falling from the summits of the cliffs as times or torrents dislodge them, into the glens or kloofs below, are at times rent asunder by their own weight, and become so completely excavated that nothing but the external crust or shell remains.

Such hollow boulders are very plentiful in the Cape Colony, but are chiefly to be found in masses between the Lion's Head and the sea ; and they are so large, that at times they have been adopted as lurking-places, and even as habitations, by runaway slaves.

Close by one of those hollow blocks did I now find myself, and therein doubtless was the assassin lurking.

I listened, and heard within it sounds that convinced me it had a tenant. The block was some nine or ten feet in diameter, and must, I knew, be partially open on the other side.

Relinquishing my rifle, as too long a weapon for close quarters, armed with my knife and revolver-pistol, I crept round with soft and stealthy steps, and at that moment a man bounded forth.

I closed with him, and, unluckily, in doing so, dropped my pistol, but grasped him by the throat. My knife yet remained, but he seized my right wrist, letting fall his musket as he did so; and so fierce and intense was the clutch that we had of each other, that not a sound, save our deep breathing, escaped us.

The moon, I have said, was waning; but her light was yet sufficiently brilliant to show me the features of my antagonist.

Scorched, sunburnt, blackened, and weatherbeaten though they were, and surmounted by a Fingo hat, I could see that their owner was no Caffre, with hooked nose and huge lips, no Hottentot, with negro features and yellow eyeballs, but a European man.

"Mark Graaff!" I exclaimed, as I recognised the outlaw by a livid scar which traversed his nose and cheeks, when, in some skirmish in the bush, he had come under the sabre of a Cape Mounted Rifleman.

"Ay, Mark Graaff!" said he hoarsely, through his firmly-set teeth.

"Scoundrel and robber, have I got you by the throat at last! You shall hang like a dog for this murderous night's work."

"Shall I, Captain Haddon?" said the fellow mockingly, as he bent me back with a strength superior to my own, and I felt his horrid breath, like that of a wild animal, on my cheek, as he uttered a fierce and half insane laugh in my ear—a laugh I had heard once before; but where?

And now a bewildering recollection of his face came over me—a recollection that confused and deprived me of the full power of resistance, and twice he made an ineffectual clutch at my hunting-pouch, as if plunder was his object quite as much as slaughter.

Suddenly he flung me from him, and as I was falling he fired a pistol full at my head. The powder scorched and the explosion stunned me, but the bullet only grazed the tip of my right ear. When I sprang up, knife in hand, to renew the struggle, the man had vanished, and I found myself surrounded by Douglas's Highlanders, with their bayonets at the charge



But to me the most startling event of the night was the circumstance that the face which had grinned so fiercely and so strangely into mine, and wakened an old memory, seemed to have been that of my old enemy, Sharkeigh, the conspirator with Prudence Grubb, the Border poacher, the gipsy of Yetholm!

## CHAPTER XI.

THE bushranger's musket was found empty, and to have been recently discharged, so that either his ammunition had been expended, or my sudden approach had prevented him re-loading.

"Sharkeigh, your Border poacher, here—as Mark Graaff, the alleged Dutch half-caste—the escaped convict and bushranger, who has married, it is said, a Caffre woman? this must be impossible," said Douglas, after he had heard my story. "Depend upon it, this must be illusion—all."

"Why so?"

"We have been talking so much of home and the past lately that your imagination has deceived you. Then the weird effect of the moonlight on his scarred visage should be remembered."

"The likeness utterly bewildered me."

"Anyway, I am sorry the scoundrel has escaped."

"I would give a hundred guineas to be as close to him once again as I have been to-night," I exclaimed with fiery energy; "yet he very nearly finished me by that pistol-shot. Oh I'd have him well jamboked, and then hung?"

"This Mark Graaff is a well-known outlaw here, by all accounts, it would seem?"

"Too well known. Long before this Caffre war began—for some four years, at least—Mark Graaff has been hunted through the mountains, woods, and kloofs by the troops and Caffre police—especially by the Cape Mounted Rifles—for robbing and murdering farmers or tiek-boors, breaking horse-kraals, firing the karoo-bushes, and committing all manner of outrages against law and good order, till he has every man's

hand against him, and has engendered in himself a hatred of all authority that amounts to frenzy—to insanity.”

“A pleasant character ! hence his mad assassination of my poor men ?”

“Exactly ; and should he and Mark Sharkeigh, the transported poacher, prove to be one and the same person, it may in a great measure account for the unrelenting hate with which he has pursued me at times ; and, now that I think of it, by heavens ! the fellow mentioned me by name to-night.”

“By name, did he ?”

“Yes, as Captain Haddon. Now, here in the Cape Colony I am simply known as Mr. Richard, the Caffre trader. But during all this last trip he has been close on my trail from Zwagens Hoek.”

“Ah ! the contents of your waggon, skins and ivory.”

“Less these than the contents of my purse and hunting-pouch—”

“Which you bequeathed to me in case you fell to night—”

“And still bequeath in case I fall in a future time,” said I gravely. “You will find the legacy a valuable one, Gerard. I have diamonds which I got among the Griquas worth many thousand pounds, and they are fine pebbles to pave one’s pocket with.”

“The Griquas—who are they ?”

“An African tribe, of mixed race, descended from the original Dutch colonists of South Africa and the aboriginal Hottentots. They dwell along the banks of the Orange River for more than seven hundred miles, and Mark Graaff knew I had been among them. But if he should be Sharkeigh—here,” said I, recurring to the former idea, “here in the Cape Colony—”

“Why, Clarice Haywood is here, and Fanny, too, for the matter of that,” replied Douglas.

“Gad ! I sha l not be surprised if the next party who turns up should prove to be that artful old harridan, Prue Grubb, with her white sanctimonious visage, and her scriptural quotations. In my Caffre experiences, I have seen tiger-wolves

with all manner of spots, and snakes with many kinds of scales, but the character of this ubiquitous Mark Graaff—if such be his name—is beyond my comprehension.”

The remainder of that restless night was soon passed, and with early dawn we left the fatal ravine, where, with no small emotions of rage and regret, the Highlanders interred their two dead men, heaping stones and branches of the wache-embetje, or sharp and prickly Cape thorn, above the double grave, to prevent wild animals from disturbing the remains.

Then my team was put in motion, and we continued our eastern route, on and on—through groves of the orange and the ingouja, large trees, bearing an oval fruit of the drupa kind, and of a delicious flavour, resembling that of sugar acidulated with lemon juice—over wastes covered with the wild tulip where the gazelle bounded past and the gentle giraffe reared up his head to look at us—anon over plains of buckwheat and maize, with its huge ears folded in smooth husks that looked full and large, and bent beneath the soft breeze that came from the Zum Bergen. The bright golden heads and long green blades were swaying gracefully to and fro, with the yellow cuckoo and the tiny sugar-bird twittering among them, while overhead in the clear blue welkin the black vulture and ravenous kite were hovering ere they made, as they did from time to time, a swoop down to devour them.

The way was level, and ere long we reached the beaten highway. My waggon rumbled smoothly on now; but the poor wounded Highlander in it had fevered and sickened fast. Oblivious of all about him, he was making a rapid passage from the hearty and stirring life around us, and from the bright and glorious sunshine in which that far and fertile landscape lay steeped, to that mysterious life that lays beyond the ken of mortal eyes.

In the extreme roughness of the road when we first toiled out of the poort, or glen, and amid the heat of the day, he rapidly became delirious, and all my little skill failed to alleviate his sufferings. Hourly he drew nearer the boundary of the unseen world, and expired just as the lovely valley in

the centre of which Graham's Town nestles opened before us. He was little more than a boy, and died raving of his mother and her cottage in the Carse of Gowrie.

He died in the cardell (or cot) of my waggon—a light frame eight feet long, which occupies the breadth of those vehicles, and is laced together with strips of thong, on which the mattress is placed, though the Caffre trader can seldom taste the luxury of sleep there, even during a halt, having to keep armed watch and ward over his cattle and property.

Proceeding by the waggon track, ere long we reached Graham's Town, a flourishing settlement situated in a lovely hollow surrounded by high green hills. Lately it was only a military post, thirty-five miles distant from sea, but is now a prosperous town amid a rich agricultural district, with some seven thousand inhabitants, of whom more than a thousand are Fingoes and Hottentots.

In the principal street there still stands the solitary mimosa tree under which Colonel Graham, an adventurous Scottish officer, first pitched his tent, when the fierce Amaponda Caffres held the neighbouring mountains, and the now quiet pastoral kloofs between were full of savage animals.

As we marched in we felt the influence of the hot wind, which there blows over the sandy surfaces from the interior, rendering the air so dry and arid as to create a parched sensation in the lips, and a longing for pale ale or iced Cliquot.

The unusual strains of the bagpipe, as we marched in to the air of "The Haughs of Cromdale," drew all the population to the principal street, where crowds of Fingoes, yellow-brown Hottentots, and even Malays, rushed after and capered around us. Some were gaily attired in wonderful cottons, with douksor bandanas tied round their woolly heads; others, *à la* Chinese, had long sharp skewers of brass stuck through their plaited hair, with scales and ornaments of brass sewn upon their cowhides, or the dirty blankets which formed the chief portion of their attire.

These were the denizens of what may be termed the "back slums" of Graham's Town. Of course, the British and few

Dutch residents were like comfortable and well-to-do colonists everywhere.

"Now for your snug old inn with the popular young barmaid," said Douglas.

"It is yonder quaint house with all the gables—said once to have been a residence of General Jansen, who surrendered the Cape to Sir David Baird."

"We'll talk 'Guide Book,' Dick, when I rejoin you."

"Where are you going?"

"I must see the mayor about billets for my men, and arrange about the burial of the poor fellow in your waggon."

"True ; then you will find me at the Halve Mone, Mynheer Hendrick Leyden, at the end of the principal street. Inquire for Mr. Richard—I am known by that name here."

Douglas halted his men, and thus drew off the obnoxious crowd, while Adrian Africander and his assistants drove my team of weary oxen, with much vociferation and noise, towards the great yard of the old inn, shouting to the animals by their pet names, while they panted in the hot wind, strained on their collars, and winced under the lash of the merciless jam-bok.

"Now, Schwartlande, you verdom kind !" "Schotlande, you black duivel !" "Wo, ha, wo ha !" "Creishman, my pooty !" and so forth, using the strange jargon of the Dutch Hottentots and cattle-drivers.

At the back porch of the inn I was met and welcomed by Mynheer Leyden himself, a fine specimen of a portly and sleek old Dutch colonist, who was quite content to learn and use the English language, to make money under British rule, and to forget all about the days when the flag of the Dutch admiral waved in Table Bay, and when General Baird and Sir Home Popham added the Cape of Good Hope to the British Empire—a time still remembered with bitterness by the Dutch colonists.

He wore a broad-brimmed straw hat and a very roomy pair of inexpressibles, with a striped linen jacket, over the collar of which his double chin fell in circles. From his lips pro-

truded a handsome pipe, with its bowl of meerschaum, which he removed as he held forth his large, fat hand, saying :

"Welcome to the Halve Mone, Mynheer Reeckard ! Out-span [*i. e.*, unyoke] your oxen, and join me in a bottle of Stellenbosch while something comfortable is prepared for you."

And in my usual fashion, though a year had elapsed since I had last been there, I entered the quaint, old-fashioned bar of the Halve Mone, where the pretty Gertrude, a blooming Dutch wench, still presided over the liquors ; and I found her, as formerly, surrounded by sundry uncongenial, silent, and smoking admirers, in the shape of Vee-Boors, or graziers, Korn-Boors, and traders of various kinds, who had come to the Graham's Town market ; and among some of these I hoped to get rid of the contents of my waggon, and even of the waggon and team, as I had fully resolved, from the convulsed state of the colony, to give up trading—for the time at least—as being too perilous, and to go to the front with Gerard Douglas.

## CHAPTER XII.

OVER our bottle of Cape wine (from grapes raised in the district called Stellenbosch), I learned from Mynheer Hendrick Leyden all the news of the disturbed locality north of Graham's Town ; of the progress of the troops past the Coega River to Commando Kraal on the verge of the dangerous Addo Bush, where our Fingo levies were encamped, and where they joined General Somerset, armed with assegais and old flint muskets. I heard, too, of the spread of the Hottentot insurrection, particularly at Theopolis ; of the night march of the 74th Highlanders under Colonel Fordyce, the total destruction of the rebel camp and flight of many of the Caffres to join Omacomo, and also Mark Graaff, whose outlaws were, as I too well knew, on the move somewhere between Hell's Kloof and Graham's Town, the inhabitants of which were protected by a detachment of infantry in Fort England.

As I listened to all these details of some hard fighting, severe toil, and very barbarous work—of murderous out-

rages, cruel mutilation, and the utter fiendishness of the insurgent Caffres towards wounded, helpless people or prisoners—told me by Mynheer Leyden, between long, solemn, and laborious puffs of the meerscham, in the clouds from which he was fast enveloping himself and becoming lost to view—while listening, I say, and gazing dreamily into the straggling street before the inn windows, where the complexions and appearance of the passers-by were so varied and striking—the fair-faced Englishman, the fat, florid, and bulbous-shaped Dutcher, the pigtailed Chinaman, the brown Hottentot, the swarthier Malay, and the coal-black negro, in every variety of costume, and in some instances almost without any—my attention was suddenly arrested by the flashing of accoutrements, the tramp of hoofs, and the appearance of a mounted cavalcade, which came cantering in, covered with dust, and drew up just before the great porch of the Halve Mone.

There were two ladies—English evidently—mounted on nags of very jaded aspect, two officers in staff uniform, whose cattle, like the sumpter or baggage horses, seemed somewhat blown, and there was an escort, which consisted of a white sergeant and ten Cape Mounted Riflemen in green uniforms, faced with black, and armed with sabres and double-barrelled rifles.

Mynheer Leyden, muttering his excuses, hurried as fast as an obese Dutchman might to receive them ; and after a time he returned to inform me, with an air of importance, that the new arrivals were two staff officers—one a major—“ and their vives going to ze frond, and dat dey would purchase my vaggon if I was disposed to zell id—der duivel's braden ? I should make a goot bargains vis them if I could—der vives were ver bretty too !”

“Who on earth can those fools be who are taking European women with them to the front at a time like this ?” exclaimed Douglas, who had just joined us.

“They are welcome to my waggon for less than half the sum I paid for it,” said I. “It cost me sixty pounds last year at Cape Town ; my team of oxen are black, well-trained

Zuurfeldt cattle, and cost me three guineas each, and my knecht, or head servant, Adrian Africander, may go with them if the travellers choose. Few drivers can handle a jambok as he does. But, having once been an officer myself, I do not like to chaffer with officers. However, if—

“I will arrange all this for you,” said Douglas. “Where are these gentlemen, Mynheer Leyden?”

“In ze great frond room, mynheer.”

“Precede me, please, and say that Captain Douglas, of the 74th Foot, will do himself the pleasure of waiting on them.”

“Ya, mynheer.”

“If one is a major, I must, in duty bound, report to him my arrival here with a detachment *en route* to the front.”

“Of course—thanks, Gerard,” said I, as he put his claymore under his arm and left me.

My life of the last five years—a life that, with all its perils, had not been without considerable monetary success—was on the eve of changing now. I might go back and live in ease at Cape Town, or return to Europe, as I had recently some thoughts of doing ; but I preferred the excitement of a brush with the Caffres.

Pondering over the past, and surmising as to the future—my chances of being shot in a petty war, and finding a nameless grave in the desert bush—I sat dreamily surveying alternately the sunny street that extended towards the fort, which consisted of detached cottages and a turf-covered square, enclosed by hedges of a prickly pear ; and, on the other hand, the quaint stable-yard, the galleries and gables of this old Dutch inn, which, like most of the houses in that region, was built of stone, cemented with a kind of glutinous earth, and whitewashed on the outside, with a roof of heavy thatch.

Its galleries, of which there was a double tier, were composed of timber-work and plaster, with grotesque heads carved on the beam ends ; and its windows quaint, irregular, and divided into many lights by mullions and crossed transoms, glazed in lozenges, while rows of bright-coloured pots with blossoming flowers were placed upon the sills, and numerous



birdcages were hung on the wooden pillars, all in the true taste of old Holland ; so that the Halve Mone wanted but a stork's nest on the chimney, and the long-legged bird of grace and good omen perched upon the steepest gable, to look like some old mansion by the shores of the Zuyder Zee, or in the Drowned Land at home.

I was suddenly roused by the hand of Douglas being laid on my shoulder. I looked up, and saw in an instant that there was, in his grave and handsome face, a singular expression of annoyance and confusion, combined with regret.

"Dick," said he, "who think you those brunettes are, that wish to purchase your waggon and team?"

"Faith, I know little, and care less," said I impatiently ; "but you seem interested. Who are they?"

"The Haywoods and Chandos Carysfort."

"What !"

"Clarice Haywood, her sister Fanny, and—and Fanny's husband, Major Carysfort, of the staff."

I started from my seat, and gazed at Douglas for a minute in silence.

"Clarice here in Graham's Town. Who else is with her?" I asked abruptly.

"That fellow Percival Graves, of the Coldstream Guards ; the extra aide-de-camp."

"Mynheer Leyden spoke of two officers and their wives?"

"Mynheer is a little confused, or mistaken as to the marital arrangement, and blundered the orders for the rooms."

"You did not, I hope, speak of me?"

"No, Dick ; I had a somewhat difficult card to play in my interview with the Carysforts. I am the odd man out here. They are, however, just going to have tiffin, and have asked us to join them."

"Us—including me?"

"Yes."

"And you consented?"

"For myself and for you—I had no excuse to offer."

"But if all you have hinted about the attentions of this

Guardsman, Graves, has truth in it, I would rather not meet—”

“Clarice Haywood?”

“Under present circumstances—yes.”

“She will never recognise you, my friend, in that strange dress, in this out of the way place too.”

“You think so?” I asked earnestly.

“No, no more than I did when we first met after the brush with the niggers in Hell’s Kloof. Besides, you forget that she knows not that you are in Africa, or even alive; she thinks that after leaving London your ship was lost, and with it all trace of you.”

“True, true.”

“So come along, there’s a good fellow; your presence will help me through a deuced awkward interview with Fanny—one I have no wish for, as we parted last in a furious pet, of which she may, perhaps, have repented after. Then you have business to transact about the sale of your waggon and team. How pleasant to do it with Clarice herself.”

“Oh, Douglas, how can you jest with me?” I exclaimed.

The temptation to see her, to hear her voice, to stand in her presence and look into her eyes, to breathe the same air with her once again, proved all too strong to be resisted; and as one in a dream I suffered myself to be led by Douglas into the large and spacious room in which the four travellers were seated.

“Well, Captain Douglas,” said Major Carysfort, who was a handsome man in his fortieth year, with something of a lisp in his voice and a decidedly supercilious air, for he knew well enough that he had supplanted, and most tenderly wounded the good soldier he now addressed; “well even in this age of universal vagabondism, while all the world is flying about by rail and steamer, you are about the last person I should have expected to meet here—here of all places.”

“Why so? You were aware that my regiment is here on service, and had gone to the front,” replied Douglas, so stiffly that Carysfort coloured for a moment; “and you forget.

major, that the world is narrowing as civilisation spreads ; so that by some odd chance one becomes known everywhere."

"Ya-as, deuced good, ya-as, even in the Caffre Bush," drawled Mr. Percival Graves, whose back was yet to me, for he was stooping over Clarice.

"Major Carysfort, allow me to introduce my friend, Mr. Richard, the well-known Caffre trader," said Douglas ; "Mrs. Carysfort, Miss Haywood—Mr. Richard."

"Aw, the person whose waggon we are about to buy," whispered Percival Graves, who was undoubtedly a handsome young fellow, but, apparently, an insufferable fop, with a banded-lined moustache and parted hair ; and who, with great empressment and fuss, was at that moment buttoning an obstinate kid glove upon the hand of Clarice ; "a waggon, by Jove ! Only think—aw—of tooling along the Lady's Mile when the carriages are thickest in such a vehicle, with fourteen oxen in hand !"

"Mr. Graves, Mr. Richard is my friend," said Douglas, with the slightest detectable asperity in his tone.

Graves bowed briefly, and surveyed me through his eyeglass, for now the buttoning of the glove had been achieved.

How often had I held that hand in mine ! How often kissed and fondled it ; how often pressed to my side that treasured and coveted little hand, when it had rested caressingly on my arm, in the pleasant evening walks at home—at home long long ago !

Clarice bowed to me, and so did Fanny, with an air of polite, partly condescending interest ; but no sign of recognition shone in the fair, soft face of either sister.

In the bronzed and bearded figure that stood before them now, with features scorched and blackened by daily exposure to the fierce sun of Southern Africa—this rough-looking fellow, clad in a coarse blouse, to which the weather had given a somewhat neutral tint, girt by a belt of hide, at which hung his pouch, and knife, and pistols, with coarse leggings of tiger skin, and rough feldt-shoen, a broad-leaved hat garnished with an ostrich feather—it would be difficult to recognise the smartly-moustached, glaze-booted, and kid-gloved Fusilier

officer of five years ago at Walcot Tower and pleasant Haddonrig!

Save that she was more womanly, even matronly in appearance, my Clarice was unchanged since then.

She and her sister wore white holland riding habits, bordered with blue; their broad hats with ostrich feathers were thrown aside, and notwithstanding the sun of the Cape Colony Clarice had still all that wonderful purity and brilliance of complexion which so often accompany hazel eyes, with hair of her chestnut, or rather auburn tint. There was a soft delicacy in all her features, with a patrician air of calm somewhat different from the sparkle and *abandon* of her sister Fanny, whose features were also very fair and beautiful, with laughing dark grey eyes and a profusion of golden hair, to which the sunlight, as it streamed aslant through a window near her, gave the aspect of a shining aureole round her head.

"Be seated, Mr. Richard, please," said Major Carysfort. "I have asked Captain Douglas to have a little tiffin with us; and if you will do us the favour to join him, we shall talk of business after."

"With pleasure," I replied, as I took a seat near Clarice, and felt my cheek redden at the major's tone, in which there was a marked assumption of superiority.

"How long have you been in this strange country, Mr. Richard?" asked Miss Haywood.

"Five years nearly," said I, with an effort, for when I heard her well-remembered voice I felt, like Claude Melnotte, in all its force, "the old time come o'er me."

An electric thrill passed through every nerve, and, as I listened breathlessly for her to speak again, I seemed to take up a link that had been dropped—the link of a previous period of existence.

"Five years, and all that time you have been here?" she exclaimed.

"Nearly all that time," I replied in a choking voice, and half repenting my character of incognito.

"Pardon our curiosity."

"It is a prerogative of the ladies," said Carysfort.

"You must have seen some wild work—dooiced wild work—ya-as, of course," said Graves, a solemn, slow, and lackadaisical fellow, who drawled, and used *w* for *r* so persistently that I do not mean to follow him; but he had a cool, patronising air, that wounded my pride and exasperated me; "you must have some queer stories to tell us, wegular waspers, eh—ya-as," he added, but I did not reply.

"And you are a Caffre trader, sir?" said Mrs. Carysfort, with a nod of her pretty head.

"Yes, madam."

"Going always among those dreadful savages?"

"From time to time."

"Without fear of them?"

"Hitherto I have had none; but now times are changed, and we are at war."

"Such a strange life you must lead," said Clarice, thoughtfully, playing with her jewelled riding switch.

"An adventurous one, certainly, Miss Haywood. To procure ivory I must shoot the elephant, or buy his tusks from the natives by giving them beads and buttons, powder and shot; to get the skin of the tiger-wolf and other wild animals, I have to use my weapons and skill, and every day's meal depends upon the accuracy of my aim, and the culinary talent of Adrian Africander, the knecht who attends me."

"Your life must be quite like one of the adventurous romances one reads," said Carysfort, laughing.

"Do your family travel with you in that huge waggon? Has your wife no fear?" began Mrs. Carysfort.

"I have no wife, madam," said I coldly.

"Not here, of course; but it will be deuced queer if you haven't one in the bush, ya-as—some pretty Caffre girl, eh?" drawled Graves, as he leisurely bit off the end of a cigar, preparatory to smoking, and I gave Douglas a glance expressive of impatience.

"Pardon me," resumed the incorrigible Fanny, laughing; "but is your companion in these wild wanderings always that

dreadful-looking Hottentot?" she asked, pointing to where my attendant was finishing some mess of his own cooking—a repast contained in a gourd—by carefully wiping his metal knife, fork, and spoon on his own woolly caput, prior to replacing them in his travelling bag.

"Adrian Africander is a very steady fellow," said I; "and, moreover, is a pensioner from the Cape Mounted Rifles. I was not always what I am," I added, with an irrepressible burst of feeling, under which I saw Douglas wince and smile; "I was not always the homeless wanderer you find me now, Miss Haywood. I am one that has known happier times—it may be that I have seen happier and brighter and better days, to use a phrase not much liked in the fashionable world."

"By Jove, I agree with him, and don't like your 'has been,' and all that sort of thing," whispered Graves to Fanny, while Clarice gave me a bow, or inclination of the head, with a glance so expressive of inquiry or of commiseration, that I added, though scarcely knowing what I said—

"I am one of those who, when the blind jade slips, or becomes freakish, have but to resort to their wit or courage. Thank heaven, which has given me a little of both, I am now a man ready to face anything."

"A strange fellow, your friend," said Mrs. Carysfort to Douglas.

"But amid all the perils of your Caffie career, you have been, I hope, laying up for the future?"

"Laying up—pardon my repetition of your words, Miss Haywood; but I have long since ceased to care about the future. I have sought but to forget the present and the past. Weak, and too often confiding, is he who builds his hope upon the future—in this life, at least."

"Ya-as, by Jove!" assented the brilliant Mr. Graves, eyeing me through his glass. "I have often made a false book on the Derby, and been sold—doocidly I have!"

"You are quite a cynic, Mr. Richard," said the major.

"I was not always so," I replied, laughing.

"Here's tiffin," exclaimed our host, as a Hottentot waiter,

clad in a spotless white jacket and ditto trousers, with a towel over one arm, appeared, to intimate in his own peculiar jargon, that luncheon awaited us in the next room. "Spirit of the immortal Cliquot, oh, that we might invoke thee! but that would be a vain task in the Halve Mone at Graham's Town. Graves, give your arm to Mrs. Carysfort—Miss Haywood, Mr. Richard. Douglas and I will bring up the rear."

And in this order we left the room, I with Clarice leaning on my arm, and Fanny smiling covertly at my somewhat uncouth attire! As I passed Douglas, he whispered—

"Is this concealment fair?"

"As yet, yes," said I, "for I wish to observe."

Past relations between Fanny and Douglas rendered them somewhat reserved, even constrained, in manner; both were nervously and scrupulously polite, but were evidently desirous of having this chance meeting ended and over.

Carysfort, a finished gentleman and man of the world, felt and saw the whole situation, and thus hastened to relieve both by engaging Douglas in a close conversation about the chances and turns of the colonial war in which we were involved, of the reinforcements that were coming from Europe, and so forth, so that I had Clarice almost entirely to myself, for Fanny was obliged to occupy her time with the vapid Percival Graves; but all the details of that forenoon tiffin seemed a dream to me.

Ere long, we shall see how all this ended.

### CHAPTER XIII.

FANNY—Mrs. Carysfort, I should say—might well smile at my African trader's costume, which seemed somewhat of the Robinson Crusoe order, when contrasted with the well-made blue surtouts, padded and frogged, and the braided pantaloons of her husband and Mr. Graves, or the handsome Highland uniform of Gerard Douglas, laced with gold, and faced with spotless white; but it was my safe disguise for the time, though I was piqued that her eyes failed to pierce it.

Strange indeed it would have been, if a woman of Clarice

Haywood's appearance, style, and air of high breeding was without admirers, and in the course of conversation, by the scraps of raillery or quizzing that fell from her sister, and admissions made by Graves, I learned that she had many among the garrison and others at Cape Town, while it was but too evident to me that the young Guardsman was, after his own fashion, devoted to her, and that his attentions did not seem displeasing.

Her face, though pale, was, as I have said, beautifully delicate and purely patrician, much more so than that of the rollicking Fanny. Her nose was straight, her hazel eyes soft and pensive.

I sat by her side, but not as of old. I was doing the little honours of the table as a stranger, and conversing with her as a stranger, but I scarcely knew about what.

My heart—yes, my soul—was in my eyes when I looked into hers again, and as I spoke to her, yet she did not seem to observe this emotion, though my earnestness might have excited her attention, if it did not puzzle her. Oh, was I so utterly forgotten? Did neither voice, nor eye, nor hearing, bring back a dreamy memory of the past?

Pique grew strong in my heart; yet how or why, suggested reason, should she look for me then, in that far-away land? I was utterly unreasonable—I own it—and playing, perhaps, with my own fate and hers!

Oh, it was strange—passing strange! She was there by my side, the same Clarice Haywood who had reclined in my arms with her head upon my heart; she to whose kisses I had clung, whose hands and hair I had caressed a thousand times; and now she was looking at me as coolly and as curiously as if I was something of African growth and culture—a Fingo, a Hottentot or Griqua!

She seemed to feel in me but the vague and casual interest with which we view an adventurous wanderer whose path in life lies far apart from our own, and ever and anon stung me unwittingly by the marked attention with which she met the somewhat vapid remarks of Mr. Percival Graves; but then



a gentleman so well bred, so well oiled and bandolined as the young Guardsman, was a scarce commodity so far south of the Equator.

Tiffin, which was rather an early dinner than a late luncheon, fairly over, and more wine declined by me and Douglas, I saw by a glance that Carysfort was about to proceed to business by negotiating for the purchase of my waggon and team for the accommodation of the ladies, for whom—I had gathered in the course of conversation—the exposure of constant travelling on horseback was too severe. I shrunk nervously from this transaction with him; and now, happily, his intention was frustrated for the time by the lively Fanny, who sprang from the table exclaiming—

“Delightful! here is actually a piano. Oh, Clarice dear—you were always more of a musician than I, play us something.”

I hastened to open the instrument, which, though not exactly equal to one of Collard’s best repetition trichords, was a pretty fair piano of an old London maker. Mr. Graves led forward Clarice, who seated herself with a smile to him and a bow to me; and then her pretty fingers ran rapidly and skilfully over the ivory keys.

“Miss Haywood, you sing, I am sure,” said I softly.

“I once did so—a little—a very little; but I have given up even that.”

“Is it not a pity to forget so pleasing an accomplishment? If I could but hear you sing now you cannot know the delight it would afford me, a poor wanderer in the bush.”

“I should be so glad to please you, sir; but what style of music do you prefer?”

“Anything you please—I have no preference.”

“Something foreign, Miss Haywood,” suggested the aide-camp in his most insinuating tone. “English songs are—aw—aw—always, ya-as, such doocid twaddle.”

“Have you no decided favourite, Mr. Richard?” she asked with a smile upwards, and without heeding her admirer.

“I had, and have still.”

“Name it, please.”

"A little Scotch song."

"Scotch—oh, horror!" interrupted Graves, twirling his bandolined moustache.

"And this song, Mr. Richard?"

"Is called 'Remembrance,' and consists of but four pretty verses," said I, naming thus one we had often sung together at Walcot Tower in the days of our love.

She coloured for a moment, and then grew pale again, as she asked, with eyes full of inquiry, and even of tenderness—

"Is that your favourite song?"

"Yes, Miss Haywood."

"You have heard it sung in Scotland?"

"Yes, and in the bonnie English border-land, long, long ago. If you would but favour me," I implored.

"I shall try, though I have not sung it for years. It was the favourite of a—dear friend."

My heart vibrated as she spoke, and still more when she sung the plaintive little Scottish song, which I may be pardoned inserting here, as it is, perhaps, little known in England.

"While I behold the moon's pale beam,  
Her light, perhaps, reflects on thee,  
As, wandering near the silver stream,  
Thy sad remembrance turns to me.

Ah, to forget! The wish were vain.  
Our souls were formed thus fond to be;  
No more I'll murmur and complain,  
For thou, my love, wilt think on me.

Silent and sad I take my way,  
As fortune deigns my bark to steer;  
Of hope a faint and distant ray  
Our far-divided days shall cheer.

Ah, to return, to meet again!  
Dear, blissful thought! with love and thee!  
No more I murmur and complain,  
For thou, my love, wilt think on me."

Her voice was full of tender melancholy, sad in cadence, sweet in tone. Past love, and perished hope, I thought, were there, and as she warbled on by my side in the sinking sunset as of old—even as of old—and then, when the song was concluded, continued to tinkle the accompaniment, as if her

thoughts, like mine, were far away, and as that loved time returned under the magic influence of her voice—returned with all its tender associations—the dreary interval of time seemed like a dream—bridged over—half oblivion, for “the past returned, the present fled.”

The quaint street of Graham’s Town, with its motley crowd of coloured people, disappeared, and I seemed to see the green slopes of the Northumbrian hills, the heather moors, and the long, wavy line of the blue Cheviots, that looked down upon our distant homes, and a sigh of mingled bitterness and joy escaped me.

I pressed her to sing it to me once more, and with great good nature she did so; then, in the last verse, as almost mechanically and unwittingly my voice mingled and blended with her own, just as it was wont to do of old, I saw her eyes lifted to mine with something of wonder and inquiry, and that they were moist—those dear, tender, and beautiful eyes.

Fool that I was not to declare myself then!

“And this is your choice?” said she.

“Yes—an old remembered song, that was sung to me often in happy, happy times, long, long ago, Miss Haywood. Oh, how shall I thank you? Often when alone in vast solitudes, when the silence was broken only by the howl of the jackal, the yell of a tiger-wolf, or the trumpeting of a wild elephant in quest of food or water, I have sung that song to myself in my tent or waggon, with my eyes full of tears and my heart swollen by tender recollections. This I have done so frequently that ere long poor Adrian Africander learned to accompany me on his violin.”

“Aw—aw—’pon my soul, you are quite womantic,” remarked Mr. Graves, pulling his whiskers with a perplexed air, as he hated this style of conversation.

The afternoon was lapsing into evening, and the shadows of the houses were falling far across the street, when Mynheer Hendrick Leyden came to inform me that several merchants with whom I was wont to transact business wished to see me, and I was compelled to retire, leaving Clarice with Graves, as

I had no plea for remaining longer uninvited by Major Carysfort, who had looked on at the singing with a cloudy or haughty and somewhat disdainful air, which excited considerable amusement in the mind of Douglas.

Major Carysfort, as if determined to remind me that I was a mere Caffre trader, followed me to the door of the room, and said—

“By the way, Mr. Richard, about the purchase of your waggon, which Captain Douglas tells me you are anxious to dispose of—or to let on hire, perhaps—as the ladies can proceed no farther in the saddle, daily exposure being too much for them.”

“The waggon, with all its appurtenances, is quite at their disposal, Major Carysfort,” said I, with some *hauteur*.

He gave a cold but well-bred smile, and said—

“I have heard that you paid sixty pounds for it, but are willing to part with it for much less, and the team for a guinea a head.”

“I shall not dispose of either, Major Carysfort.”

“Indeed ; nor let them on hire ?”

“Nor let them on hire,” I replied, with positive anger. “But if you will allow me, sir, I shall have much pleasure in presenting waggon, and team also, to Mrs. Carysfort and her sister as a free gift.”

“Eh ! What the deuce do you mean, sir ? I cannot permit such an offer to be made, or if made to be accepted. Do you know to whom you are speaking ?”

“Perfectly, sir ; to Major Carysfort, of the Staff Corps.”

“I wish your property, but must pay you for it at a proper valuation. Your idea is absurd !”

“Then I shall commit the waggon to the flames, and send my team to the slaughter-house.”

“Nay, nay ; I would rather accept—”

“As you please, sir,” said I haughtily. “If you are determined to pay money, hand it over, not to me, but to the fund for the widows and orphans of those who fall in this war, the full value of waggon and team, and they are yours !”

"Give me your hand—egad, I like you—and shall do this with pleasure," said Carysfort, and we separated good friends, though his too evident *hauteur* had keenly piqued me.

Douglas had the soldiers of his detachment to look after, and I had much property to turn into cash, and also to get my waggon prepared for the reception of Clarice and her sister, if they set forth on the morrow.

Ere I set about these matters I retired for a time to reflect over the false position in which I was perhaps placing myself. From its secret pocket I drew forth the folded blue neck-ribbon, and as I looked upon it, dreamer that I was, the past returned again, even as it returned when Clarice sung, to mingle with the present, for on the morrow—how strange!—she would be the occupant and proprietress of my old Caffre waggon, which had been for so long my ambulatory home.

Then I remembered with a pang of jealousy that the moment I had risen to retire she had addressed herself to Graves, and seemed almost oblivious of my presence, for they were laughing merrily together.

As I had bade her adieu, I pressed unconsciously the slender fingers of Clarice, so that I bruised them with the rings that adorned them—one of them a gift of mine in the dear old time—and I hastened away with jealous bitterness in my heart, for it was at this apparent *gaucherie* of mine they too evidently were laughing.

"By heaven, Gerard," said I, "she certainly likes, if she does not actually love, that idiot with the parted hair."

"Time will soon show, if you permit it," was the significant reply of my friend.

Yet that night, while Douglas and Carysfort were playing an interminable game at billiards on an execrable table in the inn, with Percival Graves acting as their marker, I lingered long in the street before the Halve Mone, watching the light in a room which I knew to be that of Clarice, and twice my heart leaped when her slender shadow fell on the white window-blind.

At last the light was extinguished ; her soft cheek, I knew, was pressing the pillow ; and I turned slowly and sadly away.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

MY interview with Clarice, her singing and so forth, all savoured of romance and the poetry of life ; but for all that, I had to turn to the more prosaic matter of transmuting into cash all I possessed in the way of trade—to wit, the contents of my waggon. To one merchant in Graham's Town I disposed of all my karosses or skin cloaks, which I had procured from the Bechuna tribe, and eighty of these brought me two hundred and forty pounds. My ostrich feathers I gave to another, disposing of three hundredweight at six shillings per pound. A third person took from me all my ivory, and a bale of thirty-guinea tiger-wolf skins.

By all this transference I realised a tolerable amount, and spent a round sum in getting the waggon prepared for the use of the ladies, the cardell widened so that two might sleep in it ; and the whole vehicle was made so smart, that even Mr. Graves expressed his approval, by declaring that it was “doo-cid snug, awfully jolly, and all that sort of thing ; but then the demmed pwopwietaw gave himself the airs of a dook.”

My most important transaction was yet to be made, by selling the contents of my hunting pouch, as to have taken these to the actual scene of strife would have been an act of folly ; and when I learned their value, I knew fully the reason why Mark Graaff had tracked and followed me so assiduously, and why, in that recent personal conflict, he had made such a furious snatch at the accoutrement in question.

I possessed several diamonds which I had procured among the Griquas, and there was one which I had found sparkling at the bead-and-button necklace of a Caffre whom I had shot in our skirmish near Hell's Kloof, just before Douglas with his party came to my rescue.

A jeweller in Graham's Town filled me with wonder and joy by assuring me that this one—the largest—weighed fully eighty-three and a half carats ; that it was the finest water, and worth more than twenty-five thousand pounds.

So the diamond may well be, as Morgan says, "the emblem of fortitude!"

Another, which I had procured from a Griqua doctor, or dealer in medicinal charms, in exchange for a horse, three old Tower muskets, and a Jew's-harp, he valued at four thousand, and the rest I disposed of for a few hundred pounds. Thus I found myself suddenly beyond all my expectations a rich man; and it was singular enough that this, the last of my many perilous expeditions as a Caffre trader, should have been so eminently a successful one, and by bills, the value of all I possessed in Graham's Town was speedily transmitted to my bankers at the Cape, who were already the custodians of all my past earnings, which, I have said, were not small.

To Douglas only did I impart the secret of my good fortune, and in the warmth of his satisfaction and friendship the worthy fellow almost danced with joy.

Would I not declare myself now to Clarice? he asked; now, when I was rich enough to offer her a comfortable, even a handsome establishment, either here or in Europe?

But I shook my head, and pointing to where she was at that moment promenading between two luxurious geranium hedges conversing with Percival Graves—and with great animation, too—begged to be left in that matter to my own devices.

"Why then," he next asked, "should you go to the front, a mere volunteer, to be knocked on the head, perhaps, by some of those Caffre fellows, after all you have undergone, too?"

"I have the same reasons for going to the front that I gave you in Hell's Kloof—my occupation's gone."

"But you don't require it now."

"I like the excitement of the thing. My life is my own, and none depend upon it; and now I have the additional incentive of Miss Haywood's presence to go with you to the Amatolas."

"A most rash and foolish undertaking on the part of Major Carysfort," said Douglas, with some irritation of manner. "He should have left his women-folk at home, in the rear of Cape Town."

Douglas had now placed himself and his detachment under the orders of Carysfort, as a senior officer, for his "route" of march was all wrong now, as to dates and distances, owing to his guide, the Cape Mounted Rifleman, having misled and then deserted him—a fortunate event for me.

Next day saw us all out of Graham's Town, and again *en route* for the Amatolas, where the chief strength of the rebel Caffres were in position.

I had been elaborately, painfully thanked by Clarice for my politeness in presenting her and her sister with the use of "my beautiful waggon," which they would and could only accept the use of *pro tem.*, and by the impulsive Mrs. Carysfort I had the dubious pleasure of hearing myself designated "a dear delightful, rough diamond," as she patted me with two hands and in the prettiest little gauntlet gloves that ever came out of the celebrated establishment of Houbigant, and which fitted her taper fingers and slender wrist to perfection.

Reclining on a couch of soft skins, Clarice and her sister occupied the waggon with their two Hottentot maids. The back curtains were festooned, to enable them to see the country and to converse with us, as we rode behind on horseback—to wit, Douglas, Carysfort, Graves, and myself.

The Highlanders, with rifles slung, marched at ease in the rear, and we had an advanced and rear guard, consisting of five of the Cape Corps, and in this order we departed with the bagpipes playing, and Adrian Africander cracking his long jambok, and vociferating to the team.

"Schottlande, you verdom kind ! Creishman, my pooty ! Ach now, Schwartlande, wo ho ! Acht, Englander, get on you big paunch—you lazy duivel !"

But after a short time, when the team were all working together to his perfect satisfaction, he relinquished the terrible jambok for his violin, and perching himself on the front of the waggon, above the two pagies or water-casks, played with great taste a variety of airs, which he had picked up in the barracks at Cape Town and elsewhere.

"We should be strong enough to fight our way, if attacked by a small party," observed Carysfort, as we gradually



ascended those hills of schistus and sandstone that rise north of Graham's Town.

"Yes, if these black riflemen remain true, which I very much doubt," replied Douglas. "We hear of them deserting on all hands now."

"Aw, aw, and these Cape Mounted Wifles," drawled Graves with a look of decided uneasiness; "what kind of fawce are they?"

"Hav'n't you seen them yet?" asked Douglas curtly.

"No, not in a body."

"Well, they're mostly natives, and are really mounted riflemen, with a cross of the dragoon, as they carry long double-barrelled rifles of bright steel. They have a spice of the *tirailleur*, with a great deal of the savage, in their composition."

"When weary of conversing, Miss Haywood, you will find some English books on the little shelf near you," said I, after a pause. "A Caffre waggon is, you see, quite an emporium."

"Thanks, Mr. Richard—ah, Byron, Scott, and Tennyson. Oh, his second volume opens of itself," she added, taking down the book; "opens at a place that seems to have been often read. Did you make these marks in pencil?"

"Yes," said I.

"Then the passage is a favourite one?"

"It is; but I like all that little poem on 'Love and Duty.'"

Fanny looked up to listen, and Clarice read the passage with a low and earnest voice.

"Should my shadow cross thy thoughts  
Too sadly for their peace, so put it back  
For calmer hours in memory's darkest hold;  
If unforgotten, should it cross thy dreams,  
So might it come like one that looks content,  
With quiet eyes unfaithful to the truth,  
And point thee forward to a distant light,  
Or seem to lift a burthen from thy heart,  
And leave it freer."

She closed the book somewhat abruptly, and let her small gloved hand drop by her side, retaining still her place between the leaves, and drooped her head as if lost in thought.

After a time her whole face lighted up with a bright and beautiful expression, as Adrian Africander, by the merest chance, but by a singular coincidence, struck up the low soft air of "Remembrance," which he had picked up from me, and Clarice sang a verse or two of it, to the accompaniment of the hideous old Hottentot, whose eyeballs leered, and whose red tongue was lolled out over his violin, in delight at her condescension, as he deemed it.

Was she thinking, then, of the past, and of me?

Had we met, then, so singularly in that far Cape Colony for good or for evil, for my happiness or for misery? Were those savage Caffres towards whom we were proceeding to be as the Parcae who were to weave out the thread of our future?

The desire to address her again, to look into her eyes, and to touch her hand, came strongly over me. I urged my horse nearer to the waggon, for the purpose of saying something—what I know not—but checked the bridle, for I saw that, as she sang, her eyes were fixed neither on vacancy nor on me, but on the face of Percival Graves, who was smiling to her gaily!

On this day I observed that Douglas was very silent, and that he often loitered in the rear of the whole cavalcade. I suspected his thoughts were somewhat akin to my own, full of jealousy and bitterness, and said something to rouse him, but he shrugged his shoulders and impatiently cast aside his cigar.

"Concealment is useless with you, Dick," said he. "I would to Heaven that I had never seen—at least, had never met Fanny Haywood again, married as she is now to another. I can't get over it—my old love for her, I mean—and am in actual misery."

"Most unpleasant all this, Gerard, and we shall be some days together yet."

"Yes, for we are fully seventy miles from head-quarters."

It was strange to see this tall, dark, and splendid soldier, still the slave of Fanny Carysfort's golden hair, lovely blush-rose complexion, and little *retroussé* nose—the girl who had fooled and jilted him.

"Come, my friend, cheer up," said I, scarcely knowing what to say. "What is done is done, and regrets are unavailing now. What does Byron say about 'an honest friendship for a married lady?'"

"Don't jest with me, Dick Haddon," replied Douglas, flushing with positive anger; "how can you do so on such a subject, and at such a time?"

It was now my turn to colour.

"I am wrong. Forgive me, Gerard," said I.

"Her sister too—the sister of Clarice!" he continued reproachfully.

"I was wrong," I repeated.

"But does it not occur to you, Haddon—"

"Hush, I don't wish my name mentioned yet."

"It is of that I would speak."

"Well?"

"Does it not occur to you that you have played and are playing the spy upon her, by this plan of accompanying her *incog.*, but doubting her, concealing your identity? If you love her, as you say you do, you are playing a strange and a perilous game, and one that may compromise us both with Major Carysfort."

"I have good reason for all I do," I replied, with an emotion of doubt and annoyance. "Hear how she is talking and laughing with that insufferable fop."

"Would she do either if she thought you were so near her?"

"I must be utterly forgotten, else my voice—my face—"

"Here, and in that strange dress, bearded and bewhiskered to the eyes, how could she think of you? Dick, you are utterly unreasonable, and I don't think that I should share or keep your secret."

"It is noon now, gentlemen," said the major, who wore an ample white puggeree of linen over his forage-cap and ears as a protection from the sun, "and Mrs. Carysfort insists that we shall have tiffin here, though our picnic provisions are not exactly such as we should get from Fortnum and

Mason—no potted fowls or Strasbourg pies ; but the spot is charming, and does credit to her taste. Captain Douglas, halt your men, and order the Cape escort to dismount, relax their girths, and knee-halter all the cattle."

"Ah, such a delicious place !" exclaimed Fanny, springing out of the waggon, throwing aside her hat, and displaying the loose masses of her hair, which glittered like gold or yellow floss silk in the sunlight. "It is a veritable Eden."

"Poor Fanny," said Carysfort, laughing, "have all your *déjeuners* and kettledrums, your dinners and parties *al fresco*, come to this ?"

"Yes, here we shall lunch, Carysfort," said Fanny, who, to Douglas's idea, seemed far too happy, for she danced and skipped and pirouetted about while the Hottentot servants unpacked the hampers. "Here, on this very spot."

"Stay, Mrs. Carysfort," said I ; "not exactly here, but a little farther this way."

"Why," she asked categorically, for the pretty Fanny was usually accustomed to have her way in all things.

"Do you see that little green mound beside the stream ?"

"A grave ! oh, can it be a grave ?" she asked, while her colour changed.

"Yes, it is a grave."

"Whose ?"

"A man whom, three years ago, I saw shot near this place, and whom I helped to bury where he lies."

"Oh, heavens ! this will never do. Let us move farther up the valley by all means ; but you must tell us all about it," she added, as we selected another place about a hundred yards distant, and then Adrian and Carysfort's servant speedily spread a comfortable repast before us, and the soldiers, black and white, drawing a little away, piled their arms and proceeded to cook their dinners, which proved for the poor fellows a meal that was meagre and humble enough.

"According to Bonaparte, 'the first duty of a soldier is to be able to make soup.' According to our code," continued Carysfort, sententiously and pompously, as he cut into a cold

pie, "it was a maxim of the Duke of Wellington, that his 'first duty was obedience,' and that an officer must never make a mistake, for in reality an error becomes a crime—a crime for which there may be, perhaps, no remedy. But, bravo! Here's Château Margaux and Hochheimer."

"A truce to your axioms and maxims, dearest Chandos," said Fanny impatiently, "for I am dying of curiosity to hear from Mr. Richard all about the man who lies in yonder lonely grave."

"What was he?" asked Clarice.

"Some said a vampire—some that he was a cannibal. He was I know not what, but a terrible mystery to me."

"Oh, tell us all about him—for heaven's sake do!" exclaimed Fanny; "and, quick—fill our glasses with hock."

## CHAPTER XV.

"LIVE to learn and learn to live" is a good maxim (I began); but you may live a very long time ere you will learn a story so wild and strange as that I am about to relate to you. I have often contemplated sending the narrative to the columns of the *Cape Argus* at St. George's-street, Cape Town; but having a constitutional timidity about figuring in print under any circumstances, my tale is as yet untold.

I am not without grave doubts as to whether I should tell it even now, for morbid and sensational tales of terror and mystery are often wisely concealed, to avoid ridicule on one hand, and utter unbelief on the other. Be this as it may, I shall relate the adventures as they occurred to me. One thing is certain: I shall excite your wonder.

Three years ago I was proceeding from Graaff Reynet on one of my usual trading expeditions, across the country towards the Great Fish River, which traverses the state of Somerset. On the night prior to my departure, a note was brought to me by Adrian Africander, purporting to be from a certain Mynheer Schalk van Neukerque, who had been travelling among the adjacent mine districts at Stellenbosch,

proposing, for the sake of companionship and mutual safety to accompany me, as he was on his way to the state of Victoria.

No one could give me any information about who or what Mynheer van Neukerque was ; but the tenor of his note was pleasant, and scrupulously polite, so I ventured a written answer to the effect that I should be happy to have the pleasure of his society, and to share with him the accommodation of my waggon tent, so far as our way lay together, and concluded by hoping that he was well mounted and well armed, as the Amaponda Caffres were apt to prove troublesome ; adding that I would set forth on the morrow at sunrise.

Punctually to the time, just as Adrian, with his usual amount of noise, vociferation, and cracking of the jambok, was getting the team in order, Mynheer van Neukerque rode up, and greeted me by name.

He wore a reddish-coloured blouse, long tiger-skin boots, and a very broad hat of white felt, with an ostrich feather in the band. He was mounted on a fine and active horse ; his saddle was well accoutred with holster-pistols and a small valise ; he had also a double-barrelled gun and a long hunting-knife.

He was a man of powerful frame, but most forbidding aspect, and his extreme ugliness never grew familiar, but seemed to increase upon acquaintanceship. His eyes were of a pale, greenish gray—there were times when they seemed undoubtedly green ; his large and hairy ears were set high upon his head ; his brow was low, with prodigious frontal bones and beetling eyebrows ; and he had a cruel red mouth, teeth sharp as those of a rat, and always white and glistening.

His lips had even a peculiar wetness, as if smeared with blood, and his face, which was minus beard or whiskers, was utterly hairless and had a singular whiteness and flabbiness—an aspect that made me shudder ; and once when his hand touched mine on that morning as he accosted me, its cold sliminess, like that of a fish freshly drawn from the water, made me thrill with disgust and repugnance.

“ Good heavens ! ” thought I, “ how rash I have been ! How

shall I ever be able to travel with such an odious companion as this, so far as we must go together—more than a hundred and fifty English miles, and through such a country as the Middle Plaats, and by the base of the Great Winterberg, where the only denizens are brindled gnoos and shaggy blue wilde-beests !”

He never smiled ; his normal expression was solemn, grave, and even morose ; but recent calamity might account for that, as he mentioned incidentally that he had just buried a lovely young wife, who was the daughter of a wealthy wine-grower in the district of Stellenbosch, where the planters are of French descent, and of a description far superior to the Dutch boors, being all the descendants of French Protestants, who fled hither after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

“She was, indeed, a beautiful girl,” he added, “but three months after their marriage she had died of a rapid decline.”

Considering his remarkably cadaverous and terribly repugnant aspect, I did not experience much surprise on hearing this.

He seemed anxious to place speedily as great a distance as possible between himself and Stellenbosch, hinting that he had displeased his friends, somehow ; and thus, in his impatience, for some miles after we left Graaff Reynet he kept ahead of my waggon, nor did he afflict me with close companionship until the peaks of the Snow Bergen, and those enormous buttresses of rock which rose from the plains of Karvo had sunk behind us in the distance, and we were approaching the Middle Plaats in Somerset, where I proposed to halt for the night.

My pale, green-eyed, and red-lipped companion sat half in shadow, with his broad hat drawn well over his face, silent, and very unsociably drinking spring water, though I had produced a good bottle of Drakenstein wine ; and he further refused, almost impatiently, to share a well-cooked partridge and an ostrich egg, which Adrian had roasted to a turn.

It seemed to me that this morose personage was a prey to incurable disquiet ; but whether it was the result of remorse

for a crime, ambition marred, love unrequited, grief for his late wife, from all these together, or that his temperament was morbid beyond cure, I knew not and cared not, only that I wished him a hundred miles away from me.

His appearance and general bearing crushed even the negro vivacity of my Hottentot followers. Thus Adrian did not produce his violin as usual to entertain me ; but soon retired to his roost under the waggon, where he and my two other attendants shared a couch of skins.

When I did succeed in luring Mynheer Schalk van Neukerque into conversation, he always contrived to turn it to the darkest and gloomiest of subjects, and then occasionally his manner would warm up, and a light would gleam in his eyes, but it was a horrid and repulsive one, such as the gaseous flame that might flicker over a grave.

He seemed full of quaint and terrible conceits, and was fond of speaking of metempsychosis—the transmigration of souls from body to body ; of the transfusion of blood from the veins of one person to those of another ; of the stream of young life into the arteries of the old, who might thereby have their youth and vigour renewed, and so forth.

Once he asserted that if the blood, drawn from the human body, and kept hermetically sealed according to a certain chymical process, of which he alone was cognisant, was infused in the veins of the person from whom it had been extracted, even supposing that person had been dead and embalmed for three hundred years, it would restore him to life again—to life and strength.

His style of conversation was a veritable nightmare, and like one enduring a nightmare I listened to him.

His talk was of nothing but man eaters and vampires of whom there were authentic accounts, and it was in vain that I tried to change the subject.

So passed my first night in the pine forest with Schalk van Neukerque.

I am not a dreamer, but rather a sound sleeper. Constant exposure in the open air, rough exercise, hunting, shooting



and the perils contingent to such a life as mine, always ensure me a sound repose ; but on this night, in the cardell of my waggon, more than once, in a kind of vision or oppressive dream, from which I could not waken, I seemed to see the white and livid face and the gleaming eyes of my new companion close to mine. I seemed to feel his horrid and fetid breath upon my cheek, and the touch of his cold, slimy fingers on my throat.

Once this terror became so palpable that I started up with a shudder, to find my watch-dogs, which were chained to the waggon-wheels, barking furiously, and as I sought my revolver pistols, I could have sworn that in the starlight the bulky figure of Neukerque vanished from the back part of the vehicle.

I looked out. He was asleep, or feigning to be so, near the Hottentots on the sward. Was he ubiquitous? Could he be in two places at once?

In the morning I resolved to spare no effort to get on with my journey, and to be rid of him as soon as I could conveniently do so, for I had a horror of him such as I cannot describe. But all that day we proceeded slowly. Whether it was the result of the disturbed night I had passed, a disgust of my companion, whom even our dogs eyed askance, and at whom they growled uneasily—whether it was the hot wind which comes from the great Desert of Kalihari (the Sahara of South Africa), which feels as if at times it comes from the mouth of a furnace, and which was then beginning to blow—or whether it was the effect of all together, I know not, but I had become feverish, languid, and nervously unwell.

Then I grew worse, and when we reached the town of Craddock I was too ill to proceed farther. This place is a pretty little settlement on the eastern bank of the Great Fish River. It is surrounded by apple groves and beautiful gardens, but bounded on every side by bare and rocky mountains that overlook the wooded banks of the Stockenstorm River. The houses are all well built, and in the tasteful styles peculiar to England and Holland, though among the inhabitants there is

a gooey springling of half-castes, woolly-headed Hottentots, and sturdy Fingoes.

I put up at an inn, and sent for the only medical man of whom the place could boast—a Dutch doctor, named Hans Bruine Kasteel. A fever had seized me, and I soon became delirious; but before this crisis came I remember urging Mynheer van Neukerque by all means to continue his journey without me. But it would appear that, instead of doing so, he being amply supplied with gold, took up his quarters at the house of a Dutch boor named Burgherhout, to await, as he said, my recovery, though subsequent events proved that it was more probably my demise.

So it was in vain that I sought to free myself from this Frankenstein—this vile incubus that haunted me, and with whom I connected the fact of my illness. Some weeks elapsed before I became convalescent; but before that turn came, my unpleasant fellow traveller, who had frequently come to inquire for me, had disappeared suddenly from Cradock, and from Dr. Bruine Kasteel I heard a revelation of the singular pranks he had been playing in the town during the two months I had been ill, for such was the term of my attack; and as one in a strange dream I listened to the narrative of the doctor, with my eyes fixed languidly on the long line of stately peach trees that shade the principal street of Cradock.

While Neukerque was residing with Burgherhout, some suspicious circumstances caused him to be placed under a species of surveillance by certain inhabitants of the town and by the local authorities. It was averred that he seldom left his lodgings until nightfall, and then that he always proceeded in one direction, towards the burying ground which adjoined the church, where he disappeared till the first hours of the early morning, when he might be seen returning with stealthy steps to the house of Baas Burgherhout.

The quiet and industrious Dutch boors and burghers muttered of the proceedings to each other.

“Die de noot wil eeten moetze kraaken,” said they, which in English means, “Whoso likes the nut well must crack the shell.”

So some of the English inhabitants resolved to probe the mystery attending these movements—these untimely peregrinations which took place night after night.

A few armed Englishmen kept watch within the church-yard, but nothing unusual was found save the turfs dislodged on one or two new-made graves, and nothing was seen of Neukerque, who had probably become aware that he was watched, for his nocturnal perambulations ceased.

Finding that his steps were dogged one night, he turned furiously on those who followed him, and a rough conflict ensued with sticks and batons. He defended himself with great skill and vigour. Two or three fell beneath his blows as if struck down by a sledge-hammer ; but the rest, who laid violent hands on his person, and attempted to grasp or arrest him, were compelled to relinquish the attempt, because, as they averred, of the dreadful odour that pervaded his clothes and hair, seeming to issue from the pores of his skin.

What did it resemble ? None could say, save that it was as the very essence of utter corruption ; so he escaped them, and reached the house of Burgherhout.

Liza, a niece of the latter, who had been the object of Neukerque's attentions, and on whom he had bestowed many valuable presents—for, as I have said, his pockets were well lined with cash—from being a pretty and blooming girl, with a fair skin and soft Dutch complexion, became pale as a lily, drooping and fading away, to the great grief and exasperation of her lover, a sturdy young korn-boor, who urged the expulsion of this obnoxious Mynheer van Neukerque from the house. But Baas Burgherhout was avaricious, and loth to lose a wealthy lodger, though Liza distinctly stated that she connected her illness with his presence or vicinity.

She had frightful dreams or nightmares, in which she imagined that the livid face of Neukerque was in unpleasant proximity to her own—that she felt his odious breath upon her cheek and his hands upon her throat.

The lover now became inspired with jealousy as well as terror, and meeting Neukerque when he was walking alone—

being without companions or friends, he was never otherwise—he demanded, with threats of death, that he (Neukerque) should quit the settlement of Cradock, to return to whence he had come, or proceed to where he was going—at least, that he should never again enter the house of Baas Burgherhout.

Neukerque became filled with a terrible fury at this threat, his pale face became more pallid, his hair bristled up, his eyes filled with a green and baleful light, and his sharp teeth were clenched as he drew a knife from his belt.

The korn-boor became alarmed, and fired a revolver straight at the head of Neukerque, who eluded the ball, sprang upon him with a yell, and plunged the knife into his throat.

The young boor fell dying at the feet of his assailant. The report of the pistol brought many persons, English, Dutch, Hottentots, and Fingoes, to the spot; but oblivious of the gathering crowd, the terrible Schalk van Neukerque, besotted by his all-powerful mania, was found with his face bent over the dying boor, sucking the flowing blood from the wound in his throat.

“A rope and hang him—a rope—a rope!” cried the Englishmen.

“Der teufel’s broder!—up with him!” added the Dutch, and though some more reasonable than others asserted that “he must be mad,” a hundred resolute hands were laid on the vampire, for such they now supposed him to be, else whence those nightly visits to the churchyard, and why this horrible thirst for blood?

In vain did he struggle with herculean force, in vain did he shout in English and in Dutch that he had been fired upon, and had merely used his knife in self-defence. The lithe and active Fingoes delighted in the work of destruction, and in a twinkling a noosed rope, arranged by the hands of Adrian Africander, was dangling from the branch of a pine tree, and the murderer was strung up amid the execrations of the Europeans, and the mad yells and capers of the Hottentots and Fingoes, who performed a species of war dance around the impromptu gallows during his death agonies, which were protracted and terrible.

At last they were over, and the body swung motionless in the wind ; but after a time it was cut down, permitted to drop into a cart, by which it was conveyed to a lonely place by the side of the common highway for interment after nightfall.

The cart was placed in a shed at the back of Dr. Kasteel's mansion, and the door was locked to prevent the vulgar from gratifying their morbid curiosity by surveying the hideous remains of this strange being, who had perished by a process so summary.

Night fell, and the people began to gather as the hour for the uncouth funeral approached ; but, lo ! the door of the shed was forced open—not unlocked, but torn by violence from its hinges. The cart stood within, but it was empty ; and of Schalk van Neukerque there remained no trace, save the severed rope which had strangled him.

The body was gone.

But from that day, save that she sorrowed for her lover, the niece of Burgherhout recovered her health and bloom, and was troubled by hideous dreams no more.

Such was the strange and weird story told me by Dr. Bruine Kasteel, and I now remembered how Schalk had mentioned to me incidentally that his wife, the girl of Stellenbosch, had died of a decline after three months of matrimony, so the Fraulein Liza had had a narrow escape.

"But a vampire, doctor—a bloodsucker—a ghoul !" I exclaimed. "Can we believe in such a thing in the nineteenth century—this age of steam, and gas, and telegraphy ?"

"Der teufel !" replied the corpulent Dutchman, shrugging his shoulders. "It is strange, mynheer ; but vat are ve to subbose ?"

"And the body, you say, was gone ?"

"Vanished, mynheer."

"He could not have been properly hanged. Drawn up from the ground in the manner you describe, he must have been only partially suffocated, and not strangled."

Subsequent events led me to conclude that this must have been the case, though the little Dutch doctor asserted that

when he saw the body of Neukerque, that personage was as dead as a red herring. Some there were in Cradock who asserted that by an exertion of his medical skill the doctor had restored animation, and enabled the culprit to escape; but many more were assured that Satan had come *in propria persona* and carried him bodily away.

I recovered, and to the great regret of Africander, who in his time of leisure had become enamoured of a Hottentot Venus at Cradock, was able to set forth in three or four days after these events had convulsed that sequestered locality, and the evening of a fine day in May saw my waggon and team passing through the pleasant country near Riebeck, in Albany, and not many miles from Graham's Town, when an armed horseman, with a broad hat and ostrich feather, overtook us, or suddenly appeared to issue from a narrow kloof in the rocks, and a yell of astonishment and terror escaped Adrian Africander, who became absolutely peagreen on recognising the person at whose execution he had played so prominent a part—Schalk van Neukerque.

Utter bewilderment almost overcame the emotion of disgust on my part, when, with the nearest and only approach to a smile I had ever seen on his white, flabby face, he cantered his horse up to mine, and checking the reins, bade me good day, expressed his pleasure to see me once more able for the road, and likewise "his satisfaction at having met me, as we should now continue our journey pleasantly together;" adding, that "he would thank me for a light to his pipe, as his box of matches had been lost during the scuffle which forced him to leave that filthy town called Cradock."

The "scuffle" so gently referred to was nothing less than his being lynched by an infuriated mob!

I handed him a match in silence, and leisurely he proceeded to light his meerschaum. Greet him by words I could not, for there was something in the expression of his eye that made even me, though daily encountering and slaying the most ferocious denizens of these wild forests, shrink and cower in heart; and now, when I saw him again, the

thought of all that Doctor Bruine Kasteel had told me, and of his being hanged till dead—dead, and yet alive again !—rushed upon me, and I felt as one in a hideous dream. I felt also the necessity there was for dissembling or concealing all this, as I was yet too weak to risk a quarrel with a man who possessed alike the strength of a Hercules and the spirit of a fiend.

However, I resolved, come what might, not to spend another night with him in the forest ; but to make straight for the farm and kraal of Speke van Bommel, a Dutch boor, or farmer, of my acquaintance, whose thrifty wife was the sister of Hendrick Leyden, of the Halve Mone, and who was a man of wealth and influence in the colony, and the field-cornet of his district.

The sun was sinking behind the peaks of the Zum Bergen when we drew up in the yard of his kraal, or homestead, which was surrounded by hedges of the prickly pear for defence, and by others of the geranium bush for ornament.

Speke was long in coming forth to greet us, and when he did so his once rosy and rubicund face was pale and his eyes full of grief. His whole air betokened deep dejection, and in a very broken voice he bade me welcome, and accorded the usual permission to “outspan the oxen,” adding—

“Sorrow has come upon my household, Mynheer Richard ; my daughter Gertrude, my darling little Trüey, who has so lately come home to me, died two days ago, and I am a heart-broken karle.”

I expressed my condolence, adding—

“Bear it with fortitude and Christian resignation, my good friend.”

“Oh, talk not to me of resignation,” he replied bitterly. “You never had children, and know not what it is to lose them. Gott in himmel forgive me ! but I feel only the dull dogged despair of the heathen.”

I was loth to intrude upon him at such a time, especially with a companion so repulsive as Schalk van Neukerque ; but as no other kraal was near, I was still more loth now to pass the night as usual in my waggon or tent.

He ushered us into the dining-room or saloon of the house, the furniture of which was all quaint and old-fashioned. There were massive ebony Dutch cabinets, their shelves filled with cut-glass decanters and old blue and gold edged china, of Tournay manufacture, a ponderous sideboard, and under it a gigantic cellaret, that might have passed for a mahogany sarcophagus, so much did it resemble a tomb. Above these, as a trophy, hung the wooden shield, the spear, and sword of a Caffre chief, taken in some skirmish with the thievish Amaponda savages.

The stone chimney, with its lining of old Dutch blue tiles representing skaters on the Maese and Zuyder Zee, was without fire, but was filled by a large vase of artificial flowers, and garlands of the same, "the work of my poor dead Trüey," as Bommel said, were hung across it. Everything was in the old Dutch taste, for Speke had been a native of the Bommeler Waard, an isle of Guelderland, formed by the Waal and Maese.

Birdcages with the dead girl's pets were hung about the room. They set up a faint rejoicing as we entered, and scraped their beaks against the wire in vain, for now the hands that fed them were cold and still.

We had come at a gloomy time ; but Van Bommel was a friend with whom I had frequently traded, and he pressed us to stay till the funeral was over on the following day ; and somewhat morbidly, as I thought, he led us into the chamber of death, where the dead girl lay in her coffin, with her last favourite, a bright-eyed and tiny fawn of the springbok gazelle, nestling near it.

The girl seemed to have been fair and handsome, smooth-skinned and flaxen-haired, in her eighteenth year, and had just returned from an English educational institution at Cape Town, where she had acquired more accomplishments than usually fall to the lot of a Dutch boor's wife or daughter.

On turning to leave the room, I was struck by the singular change that had come over the face and bearing of Mynheer van Neukerque. His eyes glittered with a terrible expression,



a species of lambent light appeared to fill them ; his blood-red lips and nostrils were quivering, and his sharp teeth were fiercely set or clenched.

Perceiving that I regarded him with wonder and an extreme loathing that was undisguised, he suddenly answered that his emotion was caused by the sight of the dead girl (as I have no doubt it was), for, he continued, in her he recognised one whom he had adored in secret at Cape Town, and whom (though in the interim he had wedded and lost the girl at Stellenbosch) he loved in life as he now did in death, with much more to the same purpose, and he earnestly sought permission, to join us in sitting beside the body overnight, which most unfortunately was granted.

I had an intuitive suspicion that something horrible was contemplated by him, and resolved to watch well ; but as the night wore on I became languid and weary, for my recent illness had greatly impaired my strength and power of endurance.

The mother of Gertrude was in delicate health, and so she retired to her couch to weep alone. Speke van Bommel, his son Jan, a sturdy young boor, Schalk and myself, sat in the room where the dead girl lay, smoking and drinking in silence that was only broken by the ticking of a large Dutch clock in the panelled corridor without.

The atmosphere was close and oppressive, and the hours of the night stole gloomily and monotonously on. The utter silence seemed to me "like the stillness that precedes death and horror." I have been on many a dismal night watch, but none like that oppressive night in the dead girl's chamber.

Wearied with grief and past watching, Van Bommel and his son Jan, a phlegmatic boor bloated with beer and stupefied by tobacco, dozed off into slumber, from which I failed to rouse them. Pretending to be brooding over his grief, Schalk sat opposite to me in a semi-lethargic state ; his green eyes were watching me stealthily. There had been a sombre gloom over his white, cadaverous visage ; but when the father and son were both asleep, he suddenly became talkative,

though in a low tone, and urged me to join him in sharing the contents of the last bottle of Schiedam.

I was weak enough to accede to his proposition, and soon after fell into a profound slumber on a zebra skin that was spread upon the floor.

Next morning, when with a sudden start I awoke, stiff and chilled, the sun was streaming gaily into the bedroom, and the silver mountings of Gertrude's coffin were glittering in its light. Van Bommel and his son yet slept heavily; but opposite to me was seated Van Neukerque in exactly the same position in which I had last seen him, with the same ghostly and stealthy expression in his eyes; but I observed that his blouse was wet, as if with rain or dew.

I inquired if he had been out, but he gave me a ferocious glance, and said "No;" and having neither object nor interest to prompt further inquiry, I dropped the subject.

The noon stole on, and the arrangements for the interment proceeded. Friends and neighbours arrived in carts or on horseback, and the *cortège* set out from the kraal for the burying-ground, near a sequestered little Dutch chapel. All present, in turn, bore the dead girl, by fours or sixes, on a bier; but when the turn of Neukerque came his agitation became excessive, and just as we were entering the pathway that traversed the wood, he stumbled, and then a strange rattling sound was heard within the coffin.

A rattling sound !

We all changed colour, and pausing, gazed at each other. Some were so alarmed that they were about to fly; but Speke van Bommel sternly commanded all to stay, and the coffin was deposited by the side of the road. The lid was instantly removed, and we found within it, not the dead body of the fair-haired Gertrude, but in lieu thereof four or five large stones !

The old man fainted on making a discovery so startling, and his son was nearly in a similar condition. We gathered round them, and inquiries were made as to who had watched the dead overnight, and who of them had waked or slept, for in the night must this act of sacrilege have been done; and now

I perceived that, taking advantage of the general confusion and consternation, Mynheer van Neukerque had disappeared.

In hot haste I stated all that I knew concerning him, the terrible narration told me by Dr. Bruine Kasteel, adding how he had been so strangely resuscitated, how he had thrust his odious society upon me, and that he alone of all the four had remained awake throughout the preceding night, and that he must have been abroad for some purpose, as in the morning his garments were wet and his boots muddy, which had not been so on the preceding evening.

Shouts of dismay, stern threats in English and Dutch, with loud execrations, followed my tale.

"Ach, Gott in himmel !" cried Speke van Bommel. "Viele woorden vullen geen sac ! Search and find him !"

Then the whole funeral party separated on this errand in various directions.

He was speedily discovered in the act of issuing, mounted on his own horse, from the deserted kraal. A band of sturdy boors flung themselves with fury upon him. He was dragged from the saddle, and though he made a terrible resistance, knocking them over like ninepins, he was secured at last, and bound with cords ; but more than one of the captors shrank back in disgust and bewilderment at the dreadful odour that came from the pores in his skin.

Van Bommel placed a pistol to his head, and demanded, in grief and rage, the body of his daughter.

After a time, during which he remained silent and sullen, finding that he was menaced by a sudden and speedy death, he confessed that as soon as I had fallen asleep he had opened the coffin, taken the body of the dead girl to a little poort between the mountains, and covered it up with leaves and branches—that he had placed the stones in the coffin, and had just succeeded in screwing down the lid when I awoke.

"Why did you dare to do this ?" asked one.

"What was your purpose ?" demanded many voices.

He coolly averred that his great love for Gertrude would not permit him to have her hidden from his sight so sud-

denly in the cruel grave, and that he had concealed her in the place mentioned that he might gaze upon her form—that form so loved and tender—for a few days longer.

After the history I had given of Schalk van Neukerque's past exploits, of course, no one present believed in this. The horror of him grew deeper; but under the terror of death he conducted us to this little place near the rivulet—this little valley which Mrs. Carysfort admires so much—and here we found the body of Gertrude, concealed, as he had said, under a pile of leaves, branches, and turfs of that beautiful heath which grows in such luxuriance through all the colony, and, happily, she was untouched by hyenas, wild cats, or jackals.

That Schalk's purpose had been the indulgence of his terrible mania we could not doubt, and on beholding the remains of his daughter, though untouched and undesecrated, lying uncoffined on the dewy sward, the rage and grief of Van Bommel became unconquerable. He shot Neukerque through the head, and he fell dead at our feet.

"Da vogels (the vultures) may do the rest," cried the unrelenting Dutchman, giving the body a kick, and replacing the pistol in his belt; yet he was by nature a quiet and Bible-loving Lutheran, who thought nothing of travelling eighty or a hundred miles four times yearly to attend the *nacht-maal*, or sacramental supper of his Church.

"He is a skellum—a neuxel—a rascal—a humbug," growled Adrian Africander. "I always felt a cold and shivery sensation come ober my bones wen dat white duivel come near me. Ach, Gott! Off vit his head, Mynheer van Bommel!"

And with savage energy the Hottentot decapitated the corpse with an axe.

We hastily buried Neukerque where yonder green mound marks his grave. His head was placed at his feet, and as we dropped the body into the uncouth hole, and proceeded to cover it up, we were surprised to find that the blood had been oozing blackly from several other wounds, "the least a death to nature"—old ones which had burst open afresh, showing that he had been involved in many previous and desperate encounters.

To add to the strangeness of the story, so rapidly did decomposition set in, that his remains were scarcely recognisable within ten minutes after he fell beneath the bullet of Speke van Bommel.

## CHAPTER XVI.

"A DREADFUL story!" said Clarice, when I concluded.

"A horror," exclaimed her sister, with clasped hands, as she glanced shudderingly towards the now grassy mound which marked where Schalk van Neukerque lay in that lonely place.

"Was not the fellow mad?" asked the major, with a doubting and supercilious expression of face, as he tipped the ashes from his cigar with a jewelled finger.

"It was a dreadful mania, certainly," said I.

"Such a taste for food, by Jove!" commented Mr. Graves, in his most languid style. "Spirit of Soyer, it was, indeed, a singular mania."

"Now for one more postprandial weed, and then, major, I suppose we must march," said Douglas, glancing at the group of his men, who were buckling on each other's knapsacks.

During the time I had been relating the foregoing story the sense of Clarice's presence exercised a strange and confusing influence on my thoughts.

Did no sense of my presence steal over her?

It seemed to me—but that might have been fancy—that as my history of Neukerque's adventures proceeded the tender brown eyes of Clarice were fixed on my face with a sorrowful interest or wonder. Did my voice begin to wake a memory—to stir a chord in her heart?

I prayed heaven that it might be so; and yet, trifle that I was, I permitted Graves constantly to take at her side the place which should have been mine; and even now, while these thoughts were recurring to me, he was tying her veil round her hat, and whispering in her ear ridicule, perhaps, of the story I had told them.

"Incredible as your story may seem, Mr. Richard," said

she, turning to me suddenly, and thus corroborating the suspicion, "it is not without a comparatively recent parallel case. In a work entitled *Evenings with Cambacérès, Prince of Parma and President of the Criminal Tribunal*, it is related that a similar being, named Rafin, was suspected and tracked out in Paris, by the secret police of Fouché, Napoleon's Duke of Otranto. He was a terrible creature this M. Rafin, who resided at the Hôtel Pepin, in the Rue Saint Eloi, and after his death, before Fouché buried him, he hewed the head and hands from the body ; so, something of the same idea of preventing a return to life must have occurred to your friend Van Bommel."

My heart beat faster as she spoke, for the book referred to had been one of many I had given to her in our lover days at Walcot Tower.

"You are a reader, Miss Haywood?"

"Yes, books are my chief solace. In the little library in your waggon I find many stirring tales of military life. These seem to be your particular taste."

I bowed.

"But with your spirit and turn for adventure, did these never make you long to be a soldier?"

"I was a soldier—" I began.

"A soldier ! You, Mr. Richard?"

"I was once an officer of the line," said I, with an irrepressible burst of emotion ; "and, thank heaven, shall soon be something of a soldier again, if the general will accept my services. But the past is a subject on which I do not care to enter—or be questioned about," I added, somewhat curtly, as I saw that Carysfort, who had been twirling his moustache, now took his cigar from his lips, and seemed on the point of asking those questions which so inevitably come from a military man, as to what regiment and number, infantry or cavalry, I had belonged to.

The afternoon was cool and delightful.

"Now for the road," said Carysfort.

"Fall in the Highlanders—Cape escort to the front," cried Douglas.

"Inspann und trek," was my command to Adrian Afri-cander.

"Ya, mynheer," replied the active Hottentot, springing up, jambok in hand. "Ya—yes, Baas Richard ; I'll be quick as a springhaan vogel."

I assisted the ladies into the waggon ; but ere we departed, the playful Fanny, whose outbursts at times jarrèd on Carysfort's ideas of dignity, leaped to the ground again, that she might stroke and kiss the nose of her led horse, which, as she said, "had never a hair of his coat turned now, the dear old pet," and so forth.

As their guide, and being well aware of the minute local knowledge I possessed of the country, Clarice asked me many a question as we proceeded ; but Graves, the privileged dangler, was ever near, and hourly the tenor of his bearing to her caused jealousy in me to seal up the avowal that hovered on my lips, and confirmed the intention of observing and waiting. Yet all my old love for her—the love that had never died—was maturing again to fever heat.

I felt that I was treated with marked attention by the sisters. The admission that I had once been an officer—which circumstance Douglas confirmed, while, as I afterwards learned, Graves hinted I had probably had my services dispensed with—the story of the magnificent diamond I had sold—exaggerated, of course—others of marvellous adventure, all made me rather "a feature" in the little cavalcade, and Mr. Percival Graves was piqued thereat so far as it was in his inert and *blasé* nature to be.

But once I heard Carysfort say, and too plainly for my benefit also—

"Miss Haywood, you should keep this Mr. Richard at a little more distance. You permit him to address you too freely, and I don't think Graves quite likes it."

A smile, yet one of annoyance, appeared in the fair face of Clarice ; but Carysfort did not wait for a response, for by simply checking his horse he dropped in the rear.

"I do not like Carysfort talking to me thus of Mr. Graves," said Clarice to her sister.

"But what on earth can you see in that goose, Clarice?" asked Fanny.

"How?"

"He never reads, or thinks, or sings, or plays; he never was heard to express surprise at anything, to care about anything, to admire anything except a cigar, a glass of wine, or a horse's action. Why, the man is a brainless fool, with very white hands, I admit, and a thick head of hair, well parted in the centre and behind—his brushes do that."

"Granted; but, Fanny, he is a gentleman."

"And beaux are scarce here, eh?"

"Perhaps," was the careless answer.

I could detect that Mrs. Carysfort was piqued because her sister absorbed all the attention that this solemn Dundreary could make up his mind to pay. Clarice was too gentle to make any retort, as her love for her sister was as that of a mother for a daughter. She was maturer in thought than in years, and she regarded with anxiety this addition to their circle in the person of Captain Douglas, and feared his influence on their mutual happiness. I was delighted with Fanny for her remarks, but those of Carysfort stung me deeply.

"I don't think Graves quite likes it." I repeated this phrase over again and again. What did it mean? Were they actually engaged? However, acting on the hint he had dropped, though I smiled at it scornfully, I joined Douglas, who, full of his own luckless thoughts, rode a little way apart from us all.

We were still more than fifty miles from the Amatolas, and the real seat of war; and we had yet to pass through a portion of Beaufort, in sight of the Black Mountain, and then through Victoria into British Caffraria.

"What the deuce has inspired the Haywood girls with this desire to go to the front?" said I; "every hour increases their danger."

"Can't for the life of me tell," replied Douglas, "unless it be that Carysfort—a jealous fellow—is afraid to leave his flirting wife behind him in garrison; and, as he brings her on



here under his own eye, the unmarried sister must, perforce, accompany her chaperone."

"Well, that may, or must, be the right reading of the story ; but heaven knows they would be safer in Cape Town, or anywhere else, than on the borders of British Caffraria at a time like this."

"It has resulted in a strange meeting for us all, Dick," said Douglas, after a pause.

"For me especially. I as yet am unknown. You they recognise, as you have met before in this strange land ; but with me the whole case is so different."

"I wish that your case, bad as you may think it, were mine. It's a deuced awkward thing to be in love with another man's wife, and that man your superior officer."

"I shall continue my incog., however."

"Most unfair it is, I repeat, to Miss Haywood."

"She has forgotten poor Dick Haddon—doubtless the free-masonry of love exists no longer here," said I bitterly.

"I thought the secret was about to be told, when you so suddenly announced that you had once worn harness. But are you not a fool to let that fellow Graves have all the field to himself?"

"Perhaps so, Gerard ; but I am severely piqued."

"Piqued—by what?" he asked impatiently.

"The fooling of Graves, and her having so evidently forgotten me."

"She knows not of your existence. By Jove, I've a jolly good mind to split upon you, and tell her all about it."

As he spoke, Douglas, always a man of instant action, applied the spurs to his horse, but I caught its reins.

"Do nothing of the kind, Gerard, yet awhile. Leave me to manage my own love affairs ; one sister behaved falsely—"

"True," said Douglas, through his set teeth.

"Then why may not the other?"

"You are most harsh and unjust to that sweet Clarice."

"Anyway, I shall not deserve the name of that sable or ermine contrivance in which ladies insert their hands in winter."

"A muff."

"Exactly—a muff. You see that by her manner at this moment she encourages him."

"Pardon me—she tolerates him. Gentlemen are scarce here."

"And Guardsmen especially."

"By declaring your name, you would end all this doubt at once."

"Reveal myself in this wretched colonial guise, and while he is there? Five years have changed us little; but we meet not again with the same hearts—so far as she is concerned, at least."

"Why judge so harshly?" persisted Douglas; "without further proof too? She could not meet you without deep emotion."

But I was determined to be petulant, and to make myself miserable, and so replied:

"The hero of her first girlish romance, you think. Pshaw! Clarice is a woman of the world now, not the simple girl of Walcot Tower; and the women of that kind in this fast age are rapidly becoming cold and artificial. It is quite evident that this conceited booby has made an impression upon her, and thus I am a fool to torment myself."

"Don't be too sure of either idea," continued Douglas, who had all my interest at heart; "he may not have taken your place, and you may be unwise to resign her so easily. Think how well that girl loved you once!"

"Once! yes, that is the word."

"Speak out like a man. Tell her who you are, and that you love her still. I would that my chance was as yours is."

"To have that love contested by a conceited fop, perhaps, and ridiculed certainly by her cold and pompous brother-in-law, Chandos Carysfort. No, not yet."

"To-morrow it may be too late. Yet I would, Dick, that your case were only mine. What says a German writer? 'With me the dream of life is over. Reality alone surrounds the man. The first love, the first vow, the first real kiss. We can live but once, and the hour that has gone never returns again.'"

"Your German—Tieck, I think—is a humbug."

"True love should have faith," urged Douglas, who was full of romance and enthusiasm.

"Yes, and patience and courage too. All these have I had. I waited and trusted too; but now that I so greatly fear there exists an engagement—yes, perhaps an engagement actually—between Clarice and this Percival Graves, why should I mar her happiness or linger near her? No; I shall quit, and go—"

"Where?"

"Heaven alone knows, I don't," said I despondingly.

"Would to heaven that I, at least, was far away from this awkward vicinity to Mrs. Carysfort—far away from her and from this. She is heartless—utterly heartless!" said Douglas, as he glanced at the bright, golden-haired, and coquettish Fanny, who was reclining on a pile of soft skins under the awning, in an attitude which she knew was an effective one, and alternately smiled to him, fanned herself, or affected to read.

But though he knew it not then, she was regarding him with a perilous interest, and saying in her heart:

"Oh, what is he to me now? Nothing—less than nothing. What can he ever be? Scarcely even a friend, for to be such would be dangerous; so why should I shrink from him or care about his presence? Why?"

And she left the next mental question unfinished.

"This is the very hypocrisy of society," continued Douglas. "There are moments, Dick, when I feel almost inclined to insult Fanny by cutting coldness; others when I am dying to kiss even her hand as of old; and then I long to pistol Carysfort as an interloper; and with all this we hob and nob together, exchange our cigar-cases, and pass the wine as jollily as so many sand boys."

"She seems happy and lighthearted," said I.

"Don't say so; yet what do I want now? Why should this silly heart of mine feel a new, or rather an old, pang, in the idea that she is happy by the side of Carysfort?"

Could I wish the playful Fanny Haywood I once loved so well—yea, love still—to be otherwise than a good, loyal, and true—a perfect wife to her husband? There is, I know, a wickedness now in this clinging to the memory of the past: but what can a fellow do? However, in a few days at farthest, we shall be face to face with the Caffres, under Sandilli, and then, thank heaven, I shall have some fighting cut out for me.”

“Fate only knows how all this will end, Gerard—whether for our happiness or misery,” said I.

## CHAPTER XVII.

AS a change, Clarice proposed to mount her horse for a few miles, as we were now among beautiful scenery, where the fruit and the flowers of that wonderful climate, were all growing together by the wayside in wild luxuriance, and where graceful rheebucks could be seen bounding along the sides of the bright green hills.

Mr. Graves dismounted with graceful leisure, threw his reins to one of the Cape Rifles, and, to make himself useful, skinned off his well-fitting kid gloves from two very white hands. Mine had known no covering for five years, and were brown now as a toad's back; but, for all that, my fingers were more like those of a man than the jewelled digits of the fashionable aide-de-camp; and when Africander had Miss Haywood's pad ready, anticipating her slow admirer, I hastened to assist her to mount, and swung her up into the saddle, trembling in every fibre as I touched her once again.

She thanked me by a blushing smile, adjusted her gauntlets, took her reins and switch, and cantered her horse to the side of Douglas, with whom she entered into a conversation, which, by the reference it bore to the past, and the glances my friend cast from time to time at me, led me to anticipate the revelation that was ere long to come, though I could but occasionally hear their voices between the creaking and rumbling of the waggon, the noise of the horses'

hoofs, and the incessant cracking of Adrian Africander's jambok.

"Since my dear old father died," said Clarice, "I have never known the happiness of being my own mistress." (She was replying to some remark of Douglas's.) "I am, in fact, as you know, a species of dependent on my younger sister, as she has a position by marriage. Had poor papa, who was very heedless and improvident, left me but one hundred a year—"

"I have heard that Walcot was entailed."

"So we two girls were cut off with a mere pittance, Captain Douglas."

"A hard case, indeed, to ladies of position."

"I was about to say that I might have lived and died happily an old maid ;" and, knowing her own beauty and attractions, she smiled almost roguishly at the epithet, "in a cottage somewhere, content with my books and birds, flowers and piano—a cat, of course ; but I might have thus lived a life of my own, and not come here to live the life of others. Do you understand me, Captain Douglas."

"Perfectly, Miss Haywood."

"The present is all very well so long as it lasts. Yet why did I come here? Merely because I could not separate from the only being that loved me now, and the only relation I had in the world—my sister Fanny."

"I would to heaven you were both at home in England rather than here at this time," said Douglas, pursuing his own secret thoughts. "It is most rash and unwise of Major Carysfort to bring you to the front with him."

"Had I been left in England alone, I should have been miserable ; so that when I think life might have been sadder for me than it is, I am thankful and content."

"Sadder," thought I, as a mournful cadence in her sweet voice stirred my heart ; "can her secret sorrow be a memory of me? What will all this come to?"

About sunset we reached the village where I had suggested to Carysfort we should halt for the night.

It was almost entirely Dutch, and a most picturesque-looking little place, surrounded by green and wooded mountains that towered above a river, whose current was impurpled by the sunset sky. Speck-boom covered the rocks, and gigantic willows and graceful feathery acacias, their branches covered with mistletoe and other creepers, grew by the side of the rushing stream.

The little Dutch houses were quaint and pretty ; hedges of quince enclosed their gardens, and rows of lemon trees, loaded with ripe fruit, bordered the highway by which we marched in.

The Highlanders and Cape escort were "told off" to billets, and the Carysfort party, with Douglas and myself, were accommodated at a mansion, the Baas, or master, of which proved to be my old friend, Speke van Bommel, whose kraal having been destroyed by the Caffre insurgents, he had been compelled to seek shelter and companionship in the community afforded by a village.

The sturdy old Dutch farmer expressed great joy to see me again, adding that "of all the men in the Cape Colony I was the one most needed by the villagers just now."

"How so, Mynheer?" asked I ; "trading I have relinquished. In what fashion can I serve you?"

"In the wood beyond the river," he replied, "a tree leopard, one of the most ferocious ever known, has made his lair. He is not satisfied with the antelopes, the young baboons, and rock badgers, as food, for nightly he prowls about the village here, stealing goats and sheep, and twice in open day he has made off with children, and rent them to pieces. They were only little Hottentots, to be sure ; but Gott in Himmel ! they might have been whites."

"Why do you not lay a trap for him?" said I.

"Traps of stone and timber have been made for him ; but, as we say at home in Holland, 'Sude vossen zijn kwaad te panger (old foxes are hard to take),' so, although he is no fox, we have failed to take him. Our best marksmen have missed him, even when hunted by dogs into a tree, for he is unsur-

passed in strength, speed, and ferocity. Only yesterday he attacked a poor woodcutter, on whom he sprang from behind, and, depriving him of all power of resistance, rent him well nigh asunder with his teeth and claws, so now the man is dying."

"And the villagers would wish me to kill this fellow?"

"If any man between Cape Paternoster and Caffraria can do so, it must be you, Mynheer Richard."

"I thank you for your high opinion of my skill and courage, Mynheer van Bommel," said I, laughing.

"Surely you will not venture your life in such a matter as this?" urged Clarice, when I had translated into English all Van Bommel had said: "the ferocity of this wild animal is beyond all parallel, apparently."

I looked into her eyes with undisguised tenderness, for her voice thrilled me, and in her genuine kindness and anxiety she laid her pretty hand upon my arm.

"I shall lay his skin at your feet, Miss Haywood, or leave him my own," said I, and a spirit of desperation or bravado seized me, as I rejoiced in the opportunity thus afforded for doing something brilliant or daring—something in which others had failed—and before her too!

"I have potted many a tiger in India from the howdah of a Shikaree elephant," said Carysfort, "and see nothing in this. I should go with you else; besides, I am a married man now, and should run no useless risks."

"Will you join me, Mr. Graves?" I asked. "It will be a piece of rare sport, I promise you."

"Thanks, no," he drawled languidly, pulling out his fair flyaway whiskers. "Potting leopards is a style of thing I—aw, aw—don't know much of. A doocid bit of trouble, too, I should say—ya-as!"

"I thought you were expressing a wish for something of this kind, as a contrast to the social treadmill of London West-end life, as experienced by you men of the Household Brigade," said Carysfort, with a calm but partly disdainful smile.

‘Ya-as, perhaps I did ; but I—aw, aw—don’t see the fun of finding oneself face to face with—aw, aw—a demmed tigaw, except in the Zoo. If you are so doocid fond of such adventures, why don’t you go yourself, major?”

“I have said already that I am a married man.”

“And he that hath a wife—”

“Exactly,” said Carysfort curtly. “I dislike proverbs.”

“Are you as skilful as you are brave, Mr. Richard?” asked Mrs. Carysfort.

“It is useless to ask a man whether he is skilful, enterprising, or bold,” said I, smiling at the simplicity of her question.

“Why so?”

“One can be something that is better than all three.”

“Indeed ! What?”

“To be fortunate,” said I, glancing at Clarice.

“True,” said she thoughtfully ; “but fortune is a star that only certain men are born under. I hope that you are one of these, and as you are bent on this expedition, I may say, with *Rosalind*, ‘The little strength I have, I would it were with you.’”

“I thank you, Miss Haywood, and repeat that I shall lay his skin at your feet, or leave him my own.”

Again and again she sought to dissuade me, but without avail, so, accompanied by Douglas and Adrian Africander, I set out for the wood mentioned by Van Bommel just as the sun was dipping behind the mountains.

From the inhabitants of the village we heard accounts corroborative of all that Van Bommel had told me of the wonderful ferocity and strength of this leopard, or tree tiger. Its nature was to destroy life rather than to devour flesh.

What if my gun missed fire, or merely wounded it? If I was thus left to its mercy, and destroyed on the spot, or cruelly lacerated and mangled? I shrunk from the first idea—that of extinction—but felt a strange and gloomy joy in the chance of the latter catastrophe.

In that case I would tell Clarice who I was, and die with her hand in mine—her kiss, perhaps, upon my lips.



When we set out on this hunting expedition I could little foresee the effect it was to have upon the future safety, the fate, and the lives of Clarice and myself.

Our double-barrelled rifles were carefully loaded and capped, and Adrian Africander followed us with an additional weapon—a single-barrelled German rifle, the ammunition for which was twelve bullets to the pound of lead. It was a gun in which I put great faith in emergencies.

We crossed the river by a bridge, and rode towards the wood where the leopard had its lair.

“You saw Graves and I having a quiet weed together about an hour ago?” said Douglas.

“Yes, in the verandah before the house; and you seemed to be in very close conversation—so earnest, in fact, that, as he is almost brainless, I wondered what you were talking about.”

“We simply spoke of one who has furnished a considerable amount of conversation to you and me.”

“Clarice—Miss Haywood?”

“Yes.”

“And what were his views concerning her?”

“Matrimonial.”

“Matrimonial!”

“Decidedly so.”

“The devil! Tell me what he said.”

“His opinions were thus expressed to me, when for my own purposes, or yours rather, I sought to sift him. ‘I daresay she will have me whenever I ask her—ya-as—of course she will. Girls go to—aw, aw—India to get married, and this place is halfway there. Of course she is mercenary, and all that sort of thing, but pretty enough to be a very—aw—creditable wife for a fellow even in London. So, hang me, if I don’t think I’ll go in for matrimony. By Jove, that will be pleasanter work than shooting tigers.’”

“Hang his assurance,” said I; “there is no engagement between them, Gerard, if he spoke thus, and that is one comfort, at all events.”

"I hinted," continued Douglas, "that she might not be so easily won, and that perhaps she still loved one who was elsewhere—a certain Fusilier of my acquaintance."

"And what said he then?"

"It is deadly lively work, this Cape colonial service, so a fellow may as well—aw, aw—go in for doocid matrimony as anything else; and as for your Fusilier friend, I may remind you that I am a Guardsman, and as I once read in a book—aw, aw—"the soldier's young lady has very much the great Napoleon's view of an army; one man in red being the same as another, so long as he fills the ranks."

"This was cool insolence, Gerard."

"So I thought it. Yet to this person you will resign her."

After this we rode on in silence, and as keen sportsmen had a difficulty in resisting the inclination to have a passing shot at the numerous bustards, and especially the Namaqua partridges that whirled past us.

A small lake, named the Rhinoceros Pool, had been indicated as the place where the leopard was most frequently seen, and ere long we reached its banks, which were bordered by vast numbers of enormous marigolds, water lilies, and tulips growing wild. Among these lay the rent fragments and bones of various animals—baboons, antelopes, sheep and so forth, which had fallen a prey to the terrible quadruped we were in quest of, and the cleanly picked skull of a child—probably that of one of the young Hottentots of whom Van Bommel had spoken—was lying there, to add to the ghastly interest of the locality.

The wood grew close to the margin of the pool. It was dense, extended for several miles away towards the mountains and was chiefly composed of very ancient willow trees, called by the Dutch colonists olean wood, intermingled with mimosa species.

We galloped round the pool, as we were anxious to start our perilous game ere the night closed in, and it was closing fast.

Adrian Africander followed us on foot with all the activity

of his race. From the débris of bones which lay about the place I was certain that we were close upon his track or lair, and this idea became verified when we heard the report of a gun, and then a wild and terrible cry, as from a human being in agony, burst upon the still, calm evening air.

We pushed on towards the spot from whence these alarming sounds seemed to proceed, a species of ravine, where the wood was confined between two masses of rock, and there beheld two Caffre hunters already in conflict with our game—an enormous tree leopard.

The animal had been endeavouring to escape from them by ascending the rocks, but being closely pressed, it had turned, pulled one from his horse, and rent him with many mortal wounds, by one stroke of his mighty paw, tearing the wretched creature's scalp over his eyes. Thus he presented a terrible and ghastly spectacle.

Now, as we approached, the other Caffre was reloading his musket with tremulous haste, while the leopard was crouching on the ground, with his forepaws stretched out, and his head between them, preparatory to springing on his second prey; and at that moment there was something alike terrible and beautiful, easy and graceful, in his action and appearance. Of this grandeur and strength, agility and ferocity, no one who has only seen the leopard in an European menagerie can have any conception.

I leaped from my horse and cocked my rifle.

"Let them fight it out!" cried Douglas.

"A Caffre more or less in this world matters little to us certainly," said I. "Missed by Jove!" I added, as the Caffre fired his gun—an old Tower musket, apparently—and his bullet failing to hit the leopard, was flattened like a silver star on the rocks behind it.

The Caffre, a strong athletic, and stately-looking savage, well up in years, now uttered a cry, as if he gave himself up for lost, when, quick as a flash of lightning, the leopard was upon him, and its terrible fangs were closed in his bare brown shoulder, from whence the blood sprang forth, and its claws tore open his left cheek.

I fired, and planted a ball fairly into his throat. I had aimed point blank for the head, but his motions were alike rapid and uncertain. Abandoning his prostrate enemy, he now darted with terrible fury upon me.

A bullet from my second barrel met him as he came on ; but instead of killing, it added to his agony and fury. The hand of death was on him ; thus, though he knocked me over he was incapable of biting me. I flung aside my rifle, and grappling with him, buried my left hand among the thick white fur of his throat, and drawing my hunting knife, strove by repeated stabs to complete by the blade what the bullet had begun.

My heart was beating wildly—I panted rather than breathed. Never had I before been in so close an encounter ; and as we rolled over each other down the rocky slope, I was not without fears that either the wounded Caffre, or Douglas, or Adrian Africander, all of whom were reloading, might realise the old adage of hitting the pigeon and missing the crow, by planting a bullet in me.

All this passed more rapidly than words can describe it. By the manner in which I had wounded and seized him, I had the complete mastery of the leopard's lower jaw, and thus saved my throat—for it is at the throat such animals always spring—from his terrible teeth ; but his claws, now rapidly becoming powerless, tore and rent to rags my clothes, which were deluged by his blood.

At last he lolled out his hot, red tongue, and lay still. I was above him, but panting and breathless, and so incapable of stabbing him again, that he might have crawled away and escaped, but not with life, had not the Caffre whose life I had saved given him the *coup de grace*, by taking the knife from my weary hand and completely severing his throat.

By this time the other Caffre was dead.

When we had a little recovered our breath and presence of mind—for Douglas, who had never witnessed a conflict of this nature, had given me over for lost, as I was covered with blood—the Caffre, a grave and dignified-looking man, whose

hair was becoming grizzled, thanked me for saving his life in very pretty terms, and in the soft and musical language of his country, which abounds in vowels.

He wore a carosie of tiger skin, and a narrow but tastefully beaded band round his head. By these I knew him to be a chief among his people. But he had lost his dark cloak in the struggle, and his savage but picturesque drapery, like my own garments, had been torn to tatters. He had a handsome yet hooked nose, and was of a brown or iron-gray complexion, though his lips were thick, and of the negro type.

"I am one of the Koussie," said he; "a Caffre of the mountains."

"So I perceive; but not a follower of Sandilli, I hope?"

He smiled disdainfully.

"I owe you life, and I thank you—thank you gratefully," he added, patting my shoulder, as I gave him my handkerchief to bind over his lacerated cheek. "Why should you and I be enemies because of the different colour of our skin?"

"It is not that which makes us enemies."

"It is," said he emphatically. "The white man ever scorns, and when he can do so, tramples on the dark; but do the lilies which are white hate the roses which are red, or the flowers of the mimosa which are yellow? Do they not drink of the same sweet dew, close their leaves under the same midnight shadow, and expand them again under the same sunshine?"

"Go, chief," said I, replying somewhat in the same strain; "go in peace. At times men are fools, but you Caffres have been wicked and cruel!"

"We were wronged and invaded!"

"You have burned our kraals, slain our delicate women and little children, murdering many of our people in cold blood."

"Then your people should have stayed home. To whom does England belong? To us or to you? If to you—why did you leave it? To whom does the land you tread on belong? To us, and we leave it not to tread on yours. We know that in one day, the earth, the sky, and man were cre-

ated : but we know not why, or when, or by whom," he continued, for the Caffres have no ideas of religion, of a future state, or of a supreme being, and have not in their language a word whereby to express the idea of a deity ; but all men are equal under the sun, save those who are chiefs. "You were born an Englishman, so England, wherever that may be, is your home. We are Caffres—the Koussie of the Amatolas—so Caffraria is ours. Between our countries lies a great barrier—the vast sea. Why did you cross it? why came you here? I never went to your country, and never mean to do so. Go to some other kraal or clime, and leave us in peace with our flocks and families. Men are but fools at times, indeed ; but go ! I wish you well, for you have saved me from a terrible death. Adieu !"

And with a low salutation, after saying something in a low voice to Adrian Africander, who was busy skinning the leopard—a something which gave me a vague and unpleasant suspicion of collusion between them—the Caffre went to where his horse was haltered to a tree, and mounting it, galloped off without bestowing a glance on his slain and sorely mutilated companion, for this people bury none of their dead, save chiefs. Others are barbarously left to the wolves and jackals.

About half an hour after he had disappeared into the forest, when we had the skin off—a beautiful specimen of the *felis jubatas* the leopard proved—and were returning to the village, I heard Adrian Africander chuckling in the dark as only a Hottentot can chuckle.

"What amuses you, my friend?" I asked suspiciously.

"Dat was a Baas—a great chief!"

"Was he—who?"

"Sandilli!" cried the Hottentot, with a yell of laughter.

"Sandilli!" I repeated, aghast.

"Sandilli, who keeps the Amatolas against us?" exclaimed Douglas, in the same tone of rage and surprise.

"Ya-ya, Baas Richard."

"You treacherous scoundrel, and you permitted him to go—you, an old Cape Rifleman, in receipt of the Queen's pension !

Why did you not speak? By taking him the general might have made terms with his people, and we might have ended this war ere it is well begun."

The deed was done.

I felt inclined to flog or shoot my Hottentot follower, and was resolved to hand him over to the first civil magistrate, or to the general, to be dealt with according to his deserts, and so for the time dissembled my annoyance, lest he might leave in the night.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

ON reaching the house of the exulting Van Bommel I laid the pierced and bloody skin of the once terrible tree leopard—not without an emotion of justifiable vanity—at the feet of Clarice Haywood.

She shrank from it with a shudder, and then approached me, with her white hands uplifted, her hazel eyes full of light, and her lips parted by a beautiful smile as she looked up at me. The soft, Greuze-like complexion, so tender and peachy; her form so light and airy, and yet withal so womanly, filled me with admiration. Never did she seem more handsome than at that moment, and with mingled sadness and joy I gazed upon her small and delicately cut face, for she was my own Clarice of the past time of love and happiness.

"Oh, Mr. Richard," she exclaimed, with clasped hands, "and you are safe! Welcome back! No wounds, I hear; yet all this blood!"

"It is the leopard's. Some of it, perhaps, that of a Caffre whose life we saved from him. Thank heaven, Miss Haywood, none of it is mine!"

"Thank heaven, too, say I. I and Fanny—Mrs. Carysfort, I mean—have been quite miserable about you!"

"Why?"

"Can you ask me why?"

"Yes. About me, a stranger."

"You have been so kind and considerate to us, and are moreover a friend of Captain Douglas," she added, colouring slightly.

"Such adventures are everyday occurrences to me."

"I have to congratulate you on a victory which frees this pretty village from a dangerous pest, Mr. Richard," said Major Carysfort pompously, as he had listened with a little impatience to the interest the sisters expressed for me, whom he received as "only a Caffre trader fellow."

"But only think, major, I saved from his claws a Caffre who rode quietly off, and proved to be—who do you think?"

"Can't say, 'pon my honour. Some friend of yours, probably," said Carysfort, twirling his right moustache, and half closing his eyes in a supercilious fashion he had.

"The rebel chief Sandilli."

"Good heavens! do you say so?" exclaimed the major, becoming thoroughly interested.

"Sandilli himself, beyond a doubt. He spoke to Adrian Africander, who recognised him."

"Gwacious goodness!" said Mr. Graves to Clarice; "aw—aw—and he made all the running!"

"As you might have done had you been there," said Douglas, rather too pointedly; "but the whole affair did not occupy twenty minutes."

"A new version of 'Twenty Minutes with a Tigaw.' Aw—capital farce, by Jove!"

"You would have thought it no farce to have grappled with him, as his slayer did," said Douglas.

"I might have gone with you to-morrow; but you were determined—aw, aw—to do it to-night."

"Yes, and I rather think he has done it," added Douglas.

There was a pause now, and Gerard, who had been looking with interest alternately at me and Clarice, said—

"Miss Haywood, there is amongst us an absurd secret of which I shall no longer be the custodian, and you must share it with me."

"Douglas!" I exclaimed.

"A secret," said Clarice, "and which I am to share with you?"

"This gentleman whose courage you admire, for whose



success and safety you were, in the humanity and gentleness of your heart, so deeply interested, is my old friend and your lover, Richard Haddon, of Haddonrig. Have you been blind or dreaming, Miss Haywood? Look at him well. Have that brown skin, that ample beard, and coarse blouse so changed the handsome man you loved at Walcot Tower that you cannot recognise him?"

"Clarice," said I, holding out my hands towards her, and speaking in a voice so tremulous and tender that I could scarcely have recognised it as my own, "'tis indeed I—Richard Haddon."

She gazed at me with a stupefied air, and changing colour repeatedly, burst into tears, as she said—

"Ah! this then is the secret of the interest that was growing in my heart—this is why I never tired of listening to your voice, of looking into your eyes, as if seeking there for the fragments of a half-forgotten dream. But, oh, Mr. Haddon—"

"For heaven's sake call me Richard, as of old—as of old, Clarice," said I, taking her in my arms, and kissing her tenderly.

"Why have you thus concealed yourself and your existence from me then? It was unkind—it was cruel!"

"All that I shall explain at a fitting time," said I, for Mr. Percival Graves was in the room, and Carysfort too, the latter looking doubtfully and disdainfully on, all the more so that Fanny threw her arms round my neck, and kissed me on both cheeks, exclaiming—

"Dear old Dick Haddon! I must have been blind not to recognise you in a hundred beards and blouses. Oh, Dick, such romping and fun as we used to have together long ago at Walcot Tower!"

All the confusion now was on the side of Clarice—all the utter confusion incident to this discovery—and, sooth to say, I felt a little ashamed of the *incognito* I had preserved. I had, by use and wont, and foreknowledge, since the time of our meeting at the Halve Mone in Graham's Town, no surprise to feel; but for her, poor girl, the first ideas were, "How am I

to speak, act, or greet him after all the past, and by non-recognition seeming to have totally forgotten him?"

Some minutes elapsed before we became aware that, one by one, our friends had by tacit arrangement left us—even Graves sauntered out "to have a quiet cigaw over it, by Jove!"—and that we were together and alone.

Hand in hand we sat at last—her dear head reclining on my shoulder, my cheek resting upon her upturned brow.

"Well, Clarice—my own, my tender love, Clarice—do you think me greatly altered?" I asked.

"Since the dear old days at Walcot Tower?"

"Yes."

"You are somewhat in appearance—rougher, hardier, more bearded; yet I must have been blind, my darling—blind!"

"Ah, Clarice, I have led a strange life since then. Never has a day passed over my head without a struggle of some kind, either with wild men or wilder animals, for my daily food depended on my gun. I am older too."

"Five years only; but dearer than ever to me."

"I am almost past that time, Clarice, when a man's highest idea or first wish is for beauty of face or form. Yet you are a lovely girl still."

"And you have loved no one else since?"

"Since when, darling?"

"You loved me, Dick."

"No one, Clarice. I swear it!"

"My poor, but faithful Dick!"

"So true it is, Clarice, that 'the perfume of an early love keeps the heart pure for many a year after.'"

"Do you remember the evening when I gave you my neck ribbon," she asked tenderly.

"Could I ever forget it? Yes, it was the first time I said that I loved you. Well, Clarice, I have it still—see!" and from the secret pocket of my blouse I drew it forth. "When we were wrecked in the South Atlantic, this ribbon, the sole relic I had of you, was all I saved from the sinking ship. See how the salt water has stained it, and how time has made it fade."

"And I have treasured and worn the necklet you gave me on that eventful evening, which has never been forgotten by me."

"Nor by me, and often have I lived it over again in many a dream in the wild forests of Africa."

"Oh, Dick, who in the world is like you? And yet you cruelly kept the secret of your existence for days, when I have been travelling by your side. And Gerard Douglas, too—how I mean to scold him. It was most unkind of you both."

Then I explained my doubts of Graves—my fears of an engagement; but she only laughed, and stopped by kisses nearly all of what I had to say.

"Ah, that good soul, Captain Douglas, really seems to know and understand me better than you, Dick. How I shall ever respect and love that man!"

"'There is an old Greek saying,' says a writer, 'which is too foolish to indulge in, but it explains a perfect love as the reunion of two beings who at first were one; but, who, separated by an angry deity, have wandered blindly through the universe in search of one another. But it sometimes happens that the half soul finds its other half too late.'"

"But this is not so with us, Dick."

I caressed her tenderly for all this answer implied.

"No, Clarice," said I; "and now that I have found you again, one we shall be in soul, and flesh, and spirit. I am rich now. When I left you I was poor in purse, hopeless, and broken in spirit. I wrote you many a letter, which you never received, and as no answer came, I thought that you had forgotten me, or married another; for by time and separation those whom we may know to be living are almost as if dead, though they come at times to memory vividly, like the sweet, sad visions of the night. I was learning to be content till Gerard told me of your existence—that you were unwedded and had come to this far land, and now that dull content has, blessed be heaven, been changed to a new and sudden joy."

"Oh, what a debt of love I owe you, darling of my heart!" said Clarice, amid her tears, as she clung to me.

A silence came upon us as we sat there, half embraced, and full of our own thoughts—thoughts that had become too deep for utterance.

Clarice was thinking that her old first love had come back to her—he who had never forgotten, never been false to her amid misfortune, change, privation, poverty, and danger. Amid all these he had treasured her memory, her image, even the faded neck ribbon, exchanged for the necklet of ductile gold on that sweet evening so long ago by the old ruined tower, when the sunset was lingering softly on the blue Cheviot Hills.

It was like an exciting fiction; yet it was all a tender reality.

If we cherish a hope long, and ponder and brood over it, when the hour of its fulfilment comes, it is strange that we take it, somehow, almost as a matter of course, and thus it falls into its day and hour in the tenor of our lives.

So had I brooded, thought over, and pictured, at times, the slender chances of a reunion with my long-lost Clarice, especially as wealth came flowing in upon me. At last she was in my arms, and it seemed now but as yesterday since I left her with my heart well nigh broken.

“Too slow we learn the great truth,” said she, for she was a pious and hopeful creature, “that for those whom God takes into His own care all events do come of set purposes and forethought.”

“Hence our reunion, darling.”

So we sat long together, as in a dream, while the happy hours of the starry night stole away.

## CHAPTER XIX.

APROPPOS of Douglas's revelation of my identity, while Carysfort and Graves, through the medium of their meerschaums and cavendish, held grave consultation on this new feature in their affairs, and the sudden position I had assumed among them, and while Clarice and I were so pleasantly engaged, as related, a conversation about us ensued between Gerard

and Mrs. Carysfort ; but it rapidly became painful and awkward in its tenor and tenderness, for they were in a perilous position by their memories of the past.

It occurred in the broad and shady verandah of the house of Speke van Bommel.

"And so Richard was jealous of Mr. Graves," said Mrs. Carysfort, as she leaned against the bamboo railing of the verandah, and fanned herself, the action causing her soft, luxuriant hair, then all unbound for coolness, to ruffle out like threads of gold in the moonlight. "Jealous !" she continued, "I am sure poor Clarice gave him no reason. Graves was only a friend, travelling the same way with us—a brother staff-officer of Carysfort's, and nothing more. What could he be ?"

"In time, what might he not have been ?"

"True," said Mrs. Carysfort, with one of her silvery laughs.

"I am glad he is but a friend," resumed Douglas, who was observing her earnestly, sadly, and even tenderly, in spite of himself, for the beauty of Fanny was very winning, and he could not forget the times when he had rained kisses on those pouting lips and laughing blue eyes, and on that low, but lovely brow. "Poor Dick feared there was an engagement, and if so, was resolved not to mar it by discovering himself."

"Oh, that was too absurd !"

"Why so ? Well, he is rich now ; and instead of that Dunderary, with the delicate white hands and parted hair, she will have a handsome, healthy, strong, and active fellow, who has faced death and danger in a hundred fashions, and with whom this West-end fopling is in no way comparable."

"I can hardly fancy Clarice being married," said Fanny, with a pretty air of pondering.

"Why ? What did you think when you were married ?"

"I thought it very funny and odd to—to—"

"Funny and odd !"

"Yes, to write my name as Fanny Carysfort."

"Was that all !" asked Douglas, drawing nearer, and lowering his voice.

"No ; I also thought like Irene in her 'Repentance.'"

"And what thought Irene?"

"Oh, dear, what a deal may be done in a few minutes. I hope I may never live to repent it ! A strange idea of marriage, was it not ?"

"Was it not more strange to find that you were heartless?"

"Captain Douglas !"

"I used to be Gerard with you once. But was it not more strange to find that you had trifled with one of the divinest mysteries that heaven has given us—this human love, which it has made so strong and yet so tender in the heart?"

"And which may be false in the end?"

"As yours was."

"You are becoming severe, and I must go, Captain Douglas," said Mrs. Carysfort, fanning herself furiously, and blushing deeply.

Yet she remained, as she did not like the idea of being beaten in a war of words by Douglas, though she feared his downright earnestness.

"Oh, heavens, Fanny !—for this time permit me to call you so as of old. Since blossoms bloomed in Eden the mistakes of men have too often been traceable to the influence—"

"Of us—the weaker vessels—you would say."

"Exactly."

"Then how weak you men must be," said Fanny.

This mocking bearing offended the gravity of Douglas, who gave her a glance full of deep reproach.

"I know all that you allude to, and know all that you would wish to say—that you, you love me still," said Mrs. Carysfort deliberately.

"Love you ! Heaven above us knows that I do !" replied Douglas, striking his hands, while tears started into his fine dark eyes. "But with this dangerous admission, Fanny, must come the memory that I have no right now to do so. You can never be mine, yet I pray for your happiness."

The coquette and jilt became grave, for the hopeless love and respectful bearing of Douglas touched her.

"Don't forget, my dear friend, that at the time you allude to I was only eighteen, an age when, as some one has it, 'a woman is only a kind of refinement upon a kitten—beautiful, graceful, capricious, and treacherous.'"

"All these were you to me."

"Poor mamma was dead, and in her grave at Church Walcot; Clarice was absorbed in Dick Haddon; papa, busy ever with his horses and dogs, could not advise me; you were absent. Carysfort came, and—and you know the rest."

"Too well, too well," said Douglas, becoming more and more moved, as he heard her voice falter; and with the wild, rash longing to press her to his heart, and to take one last kiss—Carysfort's wife though she was—he gazed at her in silence.

She patted his arm kindly, and the strong, hardy soldier trembled under the magnetism of her touch.

Fanny shrunk back, and regarded him earnestly in the moonlight, forgetting for the time the probable awkwardness of Major Carysfort finding them thus—face to face, alone.

Fanny felt that she had gained the heart of this poor fellow, and that she had become the altar of all his hopes. Thus, she could not be without a deep interest in him; but she felt also a necessity for a little explanation or defence of herself—for both most perilous work.

"Pardon me, dear Captain Douglas," she began falteringly. "My love for you was—what shall I say it was?"

"Not equal, of course, to your love for my supplanter," he interrupted bitterly.

"You are pitiless. I can only admit that it was—"

"What—what?" he exclaimed impetuously.

"Born, perhaps, of a young girl's vanity, in which her fickle heart had but a small share. It is one of the thousand things which happen every day in the great world."

"So much the worse for those who live in the great world. But enough of this—the hour for upbraiding is past."

"And our conversation is becoming somewhat peculiar," said Fanny, with something of her bright coquettish smile.

It gratified her to find that Gerard loved her still ; but she knew too well that the friendship of a man and woman who at any period of their lives have been something more than friends is apt to become a very dangerous friendship indeed.

"I don't think Carysfort cares much for me, or how soon I report myself at headquarters," said Douglas.

"Perhaps not. He cannot but remember the past, and what you were then to me," continued Fanny, heedless of the "pins and needles" she was putting into Douglas. "Carysfort is polite and generous in his bearing. I ought to be happy with him."

"Ought ! I would rather hear you say that you are so."

"Well, I am happy."

Fanny felt it her duty to say this, and by urging it, hoped the assertion might one day become truth.

"Forget all the past, Gerard," said she softly, "and let us be friends."

He shivered at the sound of his name on her lips.

"Mrs. Carysfort—Fanny—I can never be your mere friend, from the fact that I was once much more—your passionate lover. Cold and conventional friendship is out of the question with me."

"Can I listen to this?" she urged reproachfully.

"Pardon me. I am wrong, and forget myself ; but when the heart flies to the head—"

"I would to heaven we had never met here, or were parted again, Douglas !" said Fanny, sadly and impressively.

"Yes, Fanny—again ; again, to meet no more, ere worse come of it to me," said he in a voice that became broken and hollow. "Oh, Fanny Haywood, I did so love you once !"

"And now?" said she, with irrepressible coquetry.

"I love you still !"

But she shrunk from the answer she had invited, saying—

"You forget that I dare not listen to words like these."

"True—true ! Forgive me. I am again forgetting myself, and what is due to you. Oh, may you be happy !"

After a time Fanny spoke again, but nervously and hurriedly.



"Happy ! who laughs as much as I ? Yet, what can I tell you, Gerard, but the old, old story of a marriage in haste and something of repentance at leisure ? I should never have treated you as I did ; but I was a silly girl. Chandos Carysfort is an irreproachable gentleman, but cold and pompous to me. He forgets that ' a man's real courtship only begins upon his wedding day.' Perhaps I am a little too exacting ; but so cold is his manner, that there are times when I actually think he—he has ceased to love me."

"For heaven's sake, don't say that to me of all men. Fanny—Mrs. Carysfort—you are mad to do so !"

"I am not mad, though I may be wrong, that so far as habit is concerned our marriage is an ill-assorted one."

"Your own seeking, my poor little Fanny."

"Upbraid me not with that, Gerard, and remember that I was piqued about a bouquet you gave to Isabelle Walmer," said Mrs. Carysfort, trembling as he took her hand in his, and feeling that they were drifting fast among the breakers. "Carysfort," she resumed, thinking to protect herself by talking about her husband, "is an honourable and upright man, of whom any wife might be proud ; but, oh, he is so cold and unsympathetic, and is for ever chiding me for what he terms my 'rantipole and hoydenish ways.' I think he has forgotten what love means, while I should like a man, whether my husband or not, to be a lover always."

In spite of herself the coquette thus showed her cards. The clasp of Douglas was tightening upon her hands, and lovely, fairy-looking little hands they were.

"Can I look Carysfort in the face after all I have admitted, and all I have listened to this night ?" she thought in her fluttering heart, which gradually filled with a new terror, and the consciousness that she must withdraw at once, for too well did she know that "the woman who hesitates is lost."

Was she about to fall, as so many others have fallen ? Dared Douglas seek to entrap—Oh, no ; he loved her wildly, hopelessly still. She was safe with him as with a brother ; but she must avoid him, poor fellow—she felt the necessity for that.

She withdrew her hands in succession, and as she did so, gave a nervous start—almost a cry of terror, when the voice of Major Carysfort said, close by—

“A lovely night, Douglas!”

“Wonderfully so; but you forget we are in the tropics,” stammered Gerard.

“I have been forgetting more than that,” said the major, with a calm, cold smile.

He had a cigar in his mouth, and his frogged coat was thrown open for coolness.

Fanny passed her arm through his, and felt utterly crushed. How much or how little of their conversation had he heard?

Douglas felt for her deeply, feeling that he had selfishly lured the spotless young wife into a false position.

“Beware of the dew, Mrs. Carysfort,” said the major, “and favour me by retiring soon, as we shall start from this by day-break. Allow me to lead you indoors. *Adieu*—ta-ta, Captain Douglas!”

And bowing to that officer, whom he left in a somewhat bewildered position, Carysfort, cool in bearing, perfectly polite and unmoved, smiling suavely, marched off with his scared and palpitating little wife, whose face of almost perpetual sunshine was now pale, and blanched with actual terror.

So, luckily, perhaps, Douglas did not get the kiss for which his soul was yearning.

“I fear we are both in a deuce of a mess—poor Fanny and I,” muttered Gerard, after he had told me all that had passed.

## CHAPTER XX.

HEAVY rains, succeeded by an intense heat, which exhaled vast clouds of snow-white steam from the green forests and great savannahs, detained us four days at the Dutch village—a longer period than we had calculated on.

The little community there were so delighted with my prowess in ridding them of the terrible tree leopard that they offered, by the voice of Piet van der Meulen, the head man of the village, otherwise known as Dickwang, or double-chin,

a tribute of four hundred rix-dollars in exchange for his hide, which they meant to nail on the church door, as the Scots used to nail the skins of the vanquished Danes in the times of old ; but this offer I declined, of course. Moreover, the skin was the property of Clarice, who thought now that much of her future life might hinge on the gift, and valued it accordingly.

From Clarice I learned that since my departure—flight it was nearly—from creditors who rent and divided among them piecemeal the proceeds of my commission and all I possessed, Mrs. Prudence Grubb had remained in quiet possession of my estate of Haddonrig, and that on her babe—supposed to be the bantling of some confederate—she had bestowed the name of my worthy uncle Halbert.

It had proved a most successful, and, for her, a lucrative conspiracy, which, as I was now in funds, I did not despair of demolishing before a Scottish court of law.

“ Life,” said the sanctimonious Mrs. Grubb, “ was but a sinful—yea, and a dreary pilgrimage on earth ;” so, to the great disappointment of the Rev. Benjamin Boreham, of the Tabernacle, she had taken to her bosom as a companion on the said pilgrimage, old Bob Bagshot, my uncle’s gamekeeper. the same who had been my ally in the serious conflict with Mark Sharkeigh, the poacher.

Great was the surprise of Clarice when I informed her that I had reason to believe—indeed, that I scarcely doubted—that I had recently grappled with and been face to face with Mark Sharkeigh during that affair in the kloof where our sentinels were assassinated, and that he was now a leader among the outlawed Bushmen.

I told her also what I had amassed and was possessed of ; that I was now rich, comparatively speaking—richer far than I could ever have been, even had I remained at home as the laird of Haddonrig ; that wealth had flowed almost unbidden and unsought upon me, for till now I had valued it not, but it was the result of many perilous expeditions and bold speculations ; and now I began to think that, instead of going to

the front to fight the insurgent Caffres as a nameless volunteer, and as such, perhaps, to leave my bones to the kites and jackals of the Amatolas, it would be wiser to return quietly back to Cape Town, get married, and take a passage by the first eligible steamer bound for Europe.

She blushed softly with pleasure, and looking timidly up at me, said, after a time :

“ And poor little Fanny ? Must I, then, leave her at last ? ”

The surmise was an assent to my proposition, and made my heart beat happy.

“ Fanny has her husband,” I suggested.

“ True ; and in this wide world I have but you.”

In her photographic album I found my old, half-faded vignette still occupying the place of honour opposite to her own. So Clarice had never forgotten me.

So passed the first day, during which the ceaseless rain descended like one vast and blinding sheet of water on the mountains and plains, to gorge the rivers that tore through the narrow rocky kloofs and ravines, bearing trees and stones, and even drowned animals—baboons, antelopes, and sheep—into the savannahs.

During our immurement in the house of Mynheer van Bommel, I had some difficulty in keeping my temper with Major Carysfort, who treated me with cutting coldness and *hauteur*, and whom I overheard say very deliberately to Clarice, in his supercilious way :

“ Miss Haywood, I crave a word with you.”

Clarice bowed.

“ I have told you that I dislike your reduced gentlemen—your shabby genteel people.”

“ Well, sir ? ”

“ And whatever this fellow was while in the line—as Douglas assures me on honour he was—he is only a Caffre trader now—half gipsy, half desperado—and his attentions are not to be countenanced by my sister-in-law.”

“ Major Carysfort,” exclaimed Clarice haughtily, “ surely I am the best judge of that.”

"You understand me, Miss Haywood?"

"Not quite."

"Once in camp or quarters," continued the major, without heeding her, "he shall be paid for his infernal waggon and team—I shall insist upon it—and he shall not be permitted to pass within our line of sentries. I can see to that, at least."

He was her brother-in-law, he had both military authority and rank, while I had neither now, and though I had every inclination to pull his nose or knock him down, I appeared not to hear all this, though it came to me plainly enough through the venetian blind of an open window, as I sat in the verandah without, to all appearance absorbed in the columns of a tattered *Cape Argus* fully three months old.

During these days of continued rain, Fanny seldom appeared amongst us, save at dinner.

On the third day, during this meal, the major said to her rather pointedly.

"Do you remember, Mrs. Carysfort, what anniversary to-morrow is?"

"No, Chandos dear," said she, starting as from a reverie.

"Think, please."

"I am doing so, but vainly."

"Think again," said the major, nearly frowning.

"The Queen's birthday, perhaps. I know it occurs in May."

"It is the anniversary of our marriage, Mrs. Carysfort."

"Oh, I had quite forgotten it—pardon me, Chandos dear!" she exclaimed, and springing up, gave the stately major a kiss on each cheek very prettily and gracefully.

"Now, weally, to forget your—aw, aw—marriage, by Jove!" blundered Mr. Graves.

The *amende* was all right and proper, yet these kisses made Douglas wince in his seat, and raise his glass of wine to his eye as if to test its tint and quality.

Douglas acknowledged to me that he felt all the awkwardness of meeting Carysfort now more than ever, especially in a circle so limited as ours. He feared also that he had placed

Fanny in a false position, and blaming himself therefore, repeated the lines of Scott,

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave,  
When first we practise to deceive !"

"Thank heaven, however, it was no worse," he added. "I shall avoid the sweet temptation of her society for the future ; for when in it I risk my own happiness, and may play with her honour, which is dear to me as life itself—yes, dear as it can be even to her cold and pompous husband—my dear Fanny, with her pretty *nez retroussé*—her irresistible little nose !" he continued, somewhat comically, amid his grief.

It was only too evident that every word she had said on that night in the verandah, and every rash and fatal admission she had made, were burning deep into the loving heart of Gerard Douglas. For nearly two entire days she secluded herself in her room to avoid him, and though Carysfort was suave and smiling, as usual, Douglas had about him a consciousness that there was a hitch in their intercourse, and this emotion made him abstracted and taciturn.

The apparently placid coolness with which Major Carysfort, feeling himself, doubtless, master of the position, viewed the renewed intimacy of Fanny and Douglas—a placidity which grew out of his own self-esteem or his perfect confidence in her—only seemed to pique the little coquette.

She began to deem him indifferent as well as cold and unsympathetic.

"Ah," thought she, "Carysfort does not know—perhaps never knew—what true love is ; yet I jilted—horrid word—poor Gerard to marry him !"

So a perilous time came once or twice on the third day of our detention at the village, when her fairy fingers lingered almost lovingly in the hand of Douglas, and when their glances and half-uttered sentences became confidential and intelligible to themselves alone. Daily association was reminding her of the old love, that he had never forgotten, and propinquity was doing the rest.

The volatile Fanny had expected her calm and stately

husband to be after marriage, as a recent writer says, "only an improved edition of a lover," and finding him altogether different—a creature who accepted her affections as a matter of course, and was often disagreeably candid—she concluded all at once that she was no longer beloved, and that her life was desolate.

Perhaps she had not quite arrived at this fatal conclusion, but she was drifting fast towards it, and hence the silent tenderness, the unuttered love, of Gerard Douglas—that grave, handsome, and winning soldier, with his three medals glittering on his breast—was most soothing to her pique and sense of imaginary wrong.

"If he weans me from Carysfort," said Fanny, as she reclined on the breast of Clarice, and shed a torrent of remorseful tears. "Oh, Clarice darling, if he weans me from poor Carysfort on one hand, and revives my old love for himself on the other, what can come of our meeting—our so-called friendship?"

"Remorse and misery. Avoid him, I say."

"But how to do so?"

"Come back with me to Cape Town, which we should never have left—yet in that case I had not met Richard Haddon."

"Oh, Clarice—to leave Chandos?"

"In the arrangements for my marriage, my sweet pet sister, I shall find you a hundred employments."

"How am I to return? I much wish to do so; for do you know, Clarice, that I am beginning to fear his power over my heart? And yet, good soul, honest and true Douglas, he does not exert it."

"The risk must not be run. Cling to me, Fanny love," said Clarice, laying Mrs. Carysfort's soft face caressingly on her own beautiful breast. "Though married, I can never look upon you otherwise than as the little romp of Walcot—the spoiled pet of our dear dead papa."

"Even as you, Clarice, were the pet of our good mamma."

And the affectionate girls kissed each other tenderly.

## CHAPTER XXI.

THAT night the sky cleared a little, and I went forth into the street of the little village alone, to smoke a quiet cigar and think over my plans for the future.

Dreams of joy were in my head; my heart teemed with great happiness, and I thought of my marriage with the long-lost Clarice. Could it be possible that such a sudden event was actually on the *tapis*?

The monetary ability to do this had been the result of my own industry, and system of bold and adventurous trading and bartering with the Caffres.

To continue our progress towards the Amatolas was more than useless—would be worse than useless for Clarice and me. Then, for some miles on the other side of Graham's Town, I knew the country to be infested by insurgent Caffres, black deserters, Tronkvolk, Bushmen, outlawed boors, and the fierce and active savages of the Amaponda tribes. Hence an escort for us would be necessary.

Probably Major Carysfort would not give me the sergeant and ten Cape Riflemen; and if he did so, could I trust them? Serious misgivings had occurred about these sable warriors of Queen Victoria. Desertions from the corps had been pretty numerous since the insurrection began; and I had observed with considerable uneasiness that during the three past days of our detention at the Dutch village, the bearing of those who accompanied us had been rather sullen, disorderly, and mutinous.

I felt that our best and chief security was, of course, Douglas's detachment of Highlanders. Could Clarice and I ever reach Graham's Town, an escort from the little garrison in Fort England might have been spared us; but what to do, opposed as I was certain to be by Major Carysfort, I knew not, and in great perplexity I continued to walk, lost in thought.

In an empty cottage Douglas, by Carysfort's orders, had established a species of quarter-guard, with a sentinel at the



door; and when the rain ceased, another on the road beyond, and therein were two of our Cape escort confined as prisoners, for striking Sergeant Robert Burns, of the 74th Highlanders, when in the execution of his duty—two worthies who bore the names of Jan Cupido and Zwart Hendrick.

Beyond this quarter-guard the road led onward to the bridge, by which the river is crossed, and then the way is, or was, bordered by thick hedges of quince. Full of my own thoughts, in which so much that was happiness mingled with perplexity, I passed the sentinel unquestioned, and strolled on farther than, perhaps, was quite safe—a mile or so—till the disappearance of the moon behind a cloud made me think of returning.

The sound of a violin in a thicket, which was bordered by the quince hedge, made me pause, for the air played was one with which I was familiar and fond of humming. It was, in fact, the "Remembrance" of Clarice, and the player was undoubtedly Adrian Africander, who had picked it up from me.

What was he doing there at that hour? Had he picked up another Hottentot Venus, as he had done at Cradock?

He played a few bars of the air, and then paused. He repeated this performance so often, playing over the same notes, that I began to suspect he was making signals; and this seemed conclusive when a low but clear whistle came out of a field of maize, and from under the shade of a large tree, which concealed me, I could see a man enter the thicket which was composed of wild cedars and yellow-wood trees.

The stranger was tall, powerful, and active in form; he carried a long musket on his shoulder, a hunting or bowie-knife, a powder-horn of such a size as the skull of an African ox alone can produce, and a brace of pistols at his girdle. A broad straw hat was flopped over his face, with a short ostrich feather and a meerschaum pipe stuck into the band of it. He had a Caffre kaross, or robe of leopard skin, over his shoulders; his trousers and feldt-schoen were otherwise like those of a colonist, and I had the entire conviction that the man was a European, and no stranger to me.

“By the pricking of my thumbs,” thought I, “something strange is up to-night.”

Curious to know what was going forward, and why my faithful knecht of the team and jambok should hold a secret meeting with any one, I carefully extinguished my cigar, and true to my hunter instincts and bushranging life, knelt on my hands and knees. Lower still—I actually crept on my face softly through the hedge among the long, rank grass and luxuriant weeds, and drew near to listen, though in doing so I was sorely worried by the uncouth noises of a colony of parrots which occupied a cameldoorn tree.

Africander and the stranger were conversing together, but in such low tones that only scraps reached me; but these scraps were sufficiently alarming to make me desire to learn more. I dared not go too close, for, unluckily, I was without arms, and I soon heard enough to convince me that if by speaking or moving, I was discovered, instant death would be my doom, for the person with whom the treacherous Hottentot now intrigued was no other than Mark Graaff, with the livid scar upon his face—or, as I began to be assured, Mark Sharkeigh—for it soon became evident that they were one and the same man.

“Der teufel hab dich,” said Adrian, with a grin; “de man who get de better ob Baas Richard must rise early in de morning, I can tell you—ya, ya!”

“I shall do so, even if I don’t go to bed at all, my fine fellow,” replied Mark, with a terrible oath. “And so the skellum has sold all his diamonds, has he?”

“Ya, Baas Mark, ebbery one.”

“Has he the money—value, I mean—about him?”

“Ya, ya.”

“How—in bags?”

“In baber.”

“Paper be hanged. These are bills, I suppose. Der teufel’s braden!” roared Mark, who had evidently picked up several Dutch words during his colonial experiences. “What arms has he got—belonging to the waggon, I mean?”

Africander scratched his woolly head.

"Dree double-barrelled rifles, dwo grooved, and a single-barrelled German rifle, and an elephant gun, all in de ole waggon."

"And the ammunition?—speak, quick!" cried Sharkeigh, who seemed to be partially intoxicated.

"Von hondred veight powder and shot."

"Good; that will do in the meantime, the rest can follow. Ach, Gott, what is that?" exclaimed Mark Sharkeigh, with a ready hand on his knife, for the damp grass among which I lay caused me to sneeze, and I gave myself over for lost.

"Bah! Only a springhaan vogel in de wet bushes."

But some uncertainty as to the nature of the sound caused them to move a few yards farther off, thus only scraps of their conversation reached me; yet I could hear the names of Jan Cupido, Jan Kok, Zwart Hendrick, and others, which I knew to be borne by the ten men of the Cape escort who accompanied us; and these were mentioned repeatedly.

"What the deuce is up?" thought I. "What does all this interest in my affairs mean?"

Alas! that I was to learn ere long, when it was all too late!

I now remembered Africander's knowledge of Sandilli, and how cunningly he had permitted him to be beyond the reach of pursuit before informing us of who the rescued Caffre was; and now he was leaguering with Sharkeigh—Mark Graaff, the bushranger, the fugitive convict, the perpetrator of a thousand outrages; and yet until now this Africander had been most faithful to me, and had stood by my side bravely in many a perilous encounter with wild animals, and in many a bloody brawl with the natives and bushmen; but somehow, in the more civilised world, there is too often "beneath the great and broad surface of this life of ours, with its impulses and motives, another stratum of hard and stern realities, in which selfish motives and interested actions have their sphere."

Anyway he was acting with gross treachery, and I resolved to have him arrested quietly in the morning, and force him, with a cold pistol barrel at his ear, to confess all.

Much more conversation, in a low, almost whispering voice, ensued, and I heard the clink of rix-dollars as Mark Sharkeigh—for so I shall in future call him—dropped them into the Hottentot's dingy paws, after which they prepared to separate.

"Repeat all I have said, and Sandill's promises, to those skellums, the Cape Riflemen."

"Der teufel, that will I. And you will be in dime?"

"Time? Sha'n't we? You shall see!"

"Ach, wo ha neuxel!" said the Hottentot, with a diabolical grin. "Een wenig tee laat, veel te laat," he added, using the Dutch proverb, which means, "A little too late is a deal too late."

"We shall be there to a moment."

And now they separated.

"There," I muttered. "Could I but learn where, and about what!"

So my friend Adrian Africander could swear by the devil though he believed in no deity or Divine power, save the spirit Humma, who caused the rain to fall, the winds to blow, and gave alternate cold and heat.

It was nearly the midnight hour now, and with my heart filled by anxiety and rage I crept out of my hiding-place and hastened back to the village.

I asked the sentries if my Hottentot had just passed in, and both assured me that he had.

Douglas was smoking a cigar in the verandah, but all our other friends had retired for the night. I told him all I had heard, and the necessity for additional precaution caused him to get half his party out of their billets, accoutred, and placed at the quarter-guard.

A search was made for Adrian Africander, but that sable functionary could nowhere be discovered; and when morning came I found that he had levanted before daybreak, taking away with all my rifles, all my ammunition and tobacco, my two best bridles, and many other things.

So, true to his savage nature, he had deceived and completely outwitted me in the end.

Yet, unhappily this loss was not the end !

## CHAPTER XXII.

THE supercilious Carysfort was disposed to treat rather contemptuously my fears of collusion between my fugitive servant and the outlaw. He thought that hostility to myself, and robbery on the part of Africander, were all they had in view. Even the references to the Cape Riflemen he laughed at ; but Douglas shared my fears that something was impending, for Mark was the leader of a gang of desperadoes and escaped convicts, all wretches of the worst description.

The fourth day of our enforced halt had drawn to a close. The rain had ceased, but the hot haze rendered our marching as yet almost impossible, so the start was to be made on the morrow, for Carysfort's impatience to get forward was now becoming pretty perceptible.

Clarice had very calmly and deliberately set before him the necessity for taking her sister back, even to Cape Town, possibly, vaguely hinting about Fanny's annoyance at meeting Douglas—Carysfort winced at the name—and the danger accruing to both sisters in the immediate vicinity of a war with savages ; and with cold reluctance he consented to their having the Cape escort to some safe place in the rear, where Fanny was to await his return, or the progress of events.

I had my own doubts and fears of the escort, but as we should draw further from Caffre influences in our southern journey, the fellows might prove trusty after all. Yet to make "assurance doubly sure," I had it finally arranged that we should be accompanied back as far as Graham's Town by Speke van Bommel, his son Hans, and four paid boors, all well armed and mounted.

Even when consenting to our arrangements, Carysfort could not conceal his dislike for me.

"I am, as the saying is, 'a soldier, and nothing but a soldier—all pipeclay and discipline,'" said he ; "and I don't

quite understand this Mr. Richard Haddon—for such his name appears to be now—or his interference in our affairs.”

“Carysfort,” replied Clarice reproachfully, and colouring painfully the while, “have not Captain Douglas, Mr. Haddon himself, and I explained all to you?”

“I don’t understand him, I repeat, and don’t care if I never do.”

“Please, Carysfort, speak kindly,” she urged gently.

“But I yield to your wishes, Miss Haywood, in this matter.”

“For that I thank you.”

“And Fanny may go; it is wiser in more respects than one.”

This one “respect” was, doubtless, the presence of Douglas in camp.

I had completed my arrangements for our return by the very route we had been, so far, pursuing. A trusty knecht of Van Bommel’s was to have charge of the waggon and team. The sisters were to have their saddle horses to ride when they chose, and were to be accompanied by other native female attendants. I had procured fresh rifles and ammunition, in case such should be wanted, for we never knew what a day might bring forth; and, to conciliate the Cape escort, by my intercession, the two mutinous privates, Jan Cupido and Zwart Hendrick, were released by Carysfort from the guard-house; and now, having, as I thought, settled everything, I found myself alone with my pipe in the beautiful garden of Van Bommel’s mansion.

I knew not how it was, but on this night, amid all the joys of my new position, a presentiment of approaching evil hung over me like a cloud.

Yet I could hear Graves laughing heedlessly with Fanny, and Clarice, singing and accompanying herself on the stringy piano of the dead Gertrude van Bommel. It was “Remembrance” she was singing once more, and the words, with the sweet cadence of her voice, made my heart thrill within me.

I could linger from her side no longer, and was turning to

rejoin her, when the sharp report of three musket shots in quick succession, and a sudden glare of light that broke upon the sky at a little distance, made me pause in doubt and alarm.

With true military instinct and alacrity, Carysfort, Douglas, and then Graves, came hurrying out to learn "what the doocid row was," as the latter said; and at that moment Sergeant Burns, in his blue blouse and tartan trews, came rushing towards the house with his rifle in his hand, and his belts half buckled on—in fact, he had been accoutring himself as he ran along the street.

"Major Carysfort!" he exclaimed breathlessly, "the Caffres are upon us, sir; they are attacking a large house at the end of the village, and killing all that come in their way!"

"In what direction is the attack?" asked Carysfort, unmoved.

"Where you see the light, sir; on the road to the bridge."

"Are the quarter-guard under arms?" asked Douglas.

"Yes, sir; and falling back this way under Corporal Wallace."

"Get the piper. The gathering will sound here, and here shall the men muster and fall in."

"Graves, get the Cape escort mounted instantly," cried Carysfort, as the sergeant vanished to execute the orders given to him, and we turned to get our arms and to leave the ladies in tears and terror.

Fanny at first made light of the affair, and was piqued by the frigid kiss of Carysfort, whose bearing was grave, but without any tone of tenderness.

"Come, major," said she, looking rather frightened nevertheless, "this is all bosh, I hope. Remember, at least, that I have a soul above hysterics and sal volatile."

"It is no 'bosh,' as you improperly term it, Mrs. Carysfort. The village is attacked by insurgent Caffres—you may hear their yells even here," replied the major. "Mynheer van Bommel, will you have the kindness to get the ladies' horses saddled instantly, that we may be prepared for any emergency?"

The stately staff officer was as cool as a cucumber.

I hung my revolver at my girdle, loaded a double-barrelled rifle, and bestowing a brief but agonising embrace on Clarice, was hurried away by Douglas, whose farewell glance at Fanny was a sad and wistful one, while Carysfort lingered till he could see the Cape escort of mounted riflemen posted about the house of Van Bommel to protect it and its inmates.

In front of it Douglas's Highlanders were already under arms, while Mac Gillivray was blowing the last notes of the regimental summons, "The Gathering of the Macleods," the same wild air that many a time and oft has called to battle the men of Lewis, Skye, and many a Hebridean isle.

"Open your pouches. With ball cartridge ; load—cap !"

The orders followed each other rapidly, and just as the Hottentots of the Rifle Corps appeared in their saddles in front of the house, we moved off at the double towards where the flames from a large thatched house—a species of kraal—outside the village were reddening the sky of a somewhat cloudy and gloomy night.

The enemy had not, as yet, broken into the village : but we could learn, from the terrified crowd of people who passed to our rear, many bearing their most valued goods, that the Caffres had attacked, pillaged, and set on fire the house of the wealthy boor, Piet van der Meulen.

Scarcely had we been gone ten minutes, when—as we afterwards learned—a man presented himself at the door of Speke van Bommel's mansion—a tall, powerful, and swinging-like fellow, armed with musket, knife, and pistols.

His general appearance and bearing were so unprepossessing that the mynheer called upon the soldiers of the Cape corps to prevent his entrance ; but Privates Jan Cupido and Zwart Hendrick, who were posted near the door, grinned from their saddles, but never moved a muscle otherwise.

The stranger, with an oath, tumbled Van Bommel aside, and entered the house, saying that he insisted on seeing Major Carysfort.

The latter, who had just buckled on his sword, and was in



the act of loading his revolver, looked up on hearing his name, and saw at the door of the dining-room a tall, bronzed fellow, in a species of half-colonial, half-Caffre costume, with a kaross on his shoulder, well armed, and having a strange, uncouth, and livid streak or scar across an unusually fierce and repulsive visage.

It was like a dream to Carysfort that he had heard before of such a face and such a scar ; but it was not until too late that he remembered the printed police descriptions of the famous bushranger, Mark Graaff.

"Well, sir," said the major haughtily, "who are you that enter thus unannounced, and what do you want?"

"A moment's speech with you, Major Carysfort," replied the other, almost abashed by the perfect coolness of his questioner.

"Speak quickly, if you please. I have no time to spare."

"Nor have I, for I have been sent here by Captain Douglas, to tell you that the attacking party are in such force that it will be impossible to hold the village against them."

"Force ! The deuce they are."

"Yes, and that you had better get the ladies mounted and away at once."

"Did not Douglas say in what direction the ladies were to go?"

"Anywhere," replied the other impatiently. "Anywhere, so that you get them quickly out of this. I'll guide you."

"There is no deception in this," said Carysfort suspiciously, and eyeing the speaker sharply, for it did occur to him as strange that Douglas should have sent his message by any one who was not a soldier.

"None, sir."

"Who are you?"

"My name matters little to you," was the sulky response.

"Then what are you?"

"A trek-boor."

"You look and speak like an Englishman."

"Appearances are often deceptive," said the other, in whose

eyes a dangerous expression was beginning to gather. "Hark! Do you hear how heavy the firing is?"

Clarice and Fanny had hastily donned their riding-habits, and Van Bommel's grooms had brought all the horses saddled to the door, so both were speedily mounted, and both looked pale and greatly agitated.

The lurid glare of the burning house now lit up the windows of the pretty village, and threw the shadows of the giant mimosas and lemon trees far along the little street. It tipped with red light the glittering rifle barrels of the Cape escort. Even their shining black cheekbones, white eyeballs, and glistening teeth were all distinctly visible in the fiery blaze; while amid the crackling of the flames, as roofs, rafters, and chimneys went thundering down into it, could be heard the shrill, wild, and demon-like yells of the Caffres, and the sharp, ringing rifle-shots of the 74th Highlanders, as they advanced at the double to attack the enemy with their wonted pluck.

"But now a sudden and wailing cry escaped both sisters, when they saw poor Carysfort, when in the act of mounting his horse, struck savagely to the earth by the clubbed musket of the sham messenger, who was no other than Mark Sharkeigh, and whose ready hands speedily appropriated the watch, purse, and rings of his victim.

Then one or two rifle-shots were discharged at the body of the major by the rascals of the Cape escort, who, throwing aside all disguise, now proceeded to ransack and pillage the house of Speke van Bommel.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

WAS the solemn presentiment of coming evil that fell upon me about to be realised in some form after all?

It would almost seem so now.

We rapidly drew near the scene of the outrage, and forming the men in rank entire, and by throwing forward the right flank of the party at an angle, while lining the dense hedge of prickly pear which enclosed the kraal of Piet van der Meulen, Douglas was enabled to enfilade the insurgents,

thieves, or whatever they were, and for a few moments the scene was alike startling and impressive to us all.

The courtyard and garden of the kraal were strewn with broken furniture, dishes, plates, and other household utensils, amid which lay the bodies of Piet van der Meulen, a bald and corpulent man, and some of his family, most horribly mutilated.

From the gaping walls—for the roof had fallen in—from the opened doors and shattered windows rushed torrents of yellow flame, against which the strange figures of the Caffres and others—some fifty or so, in all—were seen in dark and distinct outline.

All were maddened and drunk by hempseed smoked through water in bullock horns, and as their lithe, active, and wiry, but fiendlike figures, dancing with frantic gestures and yells, were seen in strong and dark relief against the mass of flaming light beyond, they presented a spectacle worthy of the graphic pencil of Gustave Doré.

Among them we could see many who were not Caffres, and whose dress proclaimed them to be Tronkvolk—Dutch, even English fugitive convicts, who had fraternised with the Caffres, and intermarried among them—wretches steeped to the lips in atrocity and crime, more hardened in cruelty than the savages with whom they consorted, and against these renegade Europeans the vengeance of the Highlanders was specially directed.

“Here are scenery and costume, by Jove!” exclaimed Graves, who, a Dundreary though he was, showed that he did not want pluck now; “a jolly—aw, aw—lot of chromo-lithographic-looking beggars these Caffres are.”

All this scene and these details we saw for a moment only, for the next instant, and just as the Caffres were about to fire another house, from whence the inmates had fled, a wreath of white smoke obscured all, as the Highlanders opened a fire upon them from two points, at sixty yards range, knocking them down like ninepins.

Now the yells rang on the night wind more shrilly than ever. I selected one powerful Caffre, and covered him with both bar-

rels ; but the contents of one served my purpose. He was deliberately mangling the body of a child which he was dragging about in its white nightdress, just as the poor little thing had been torn from its peaceful crib, or perhaps from its shrieking mother's arms.

My bullet pierced his brain. He sprang convulsively nearly three feet from the ground, and then fell dead. As he tumbled prone on his face, with hands outspread, a new and terrible emotion came over me, and I felt a wilder and fiercer excitement than before. Yet this was not the first man I had shot, for long ere this I had been in many a running skirmish with outlawed Bushmen and plundering Amaponda Caffres.

A bullet or two fired by the Tronkvolk whistled harmlessly past us ; two or three assegais launched vengefully, but at random, whizzed through the prickly pear hedge, and stuck in the turf beyond, with their iron heads downward, and their reedy shafts quivering, yet none of us were hit, and almost ere we could reload the whole rabble took to flight, and retired with wonderful speed and activity along the highway towards the hills.

By Douglas's orders, the Highlanders pursued them as they scurried away, loading and firing after them as well as they were able at random and in the darkness. We had followed the savages in this manner for about half a mile, when a halt was called by Douglas, who, taking into consideration the small number of the attacking force, and the peculiar suddenness with which they had decamped, began to fear that by pursuing them farther we might be drawn into some well-prepared ambush and all destroyed. Moreover, he was acting upon his own responsibility, for Carysfort, his senior officer, to the surprise of us all, had not appeared on the ground as yet.

Whether such a snare was prepared for us or not, we never learned ; but we were soon assured of one thing—that the attack on the remote house of Van der Meulen was but a feint to cover a deeper purpose.

"There is something up in our rear, sir," cried Sergeant Burns, a

"Another house on fire, I perceive," said Douglas.

"Yes," added I; "and, by heaven, Gerard, it is the house of Speke van Bommel!"

Apprehending we knew not what, we returned to the village in greater haste than we had quitted it, to find that the handsome and snug dwelling of our hospitable Dutch friend was a mass of roaring flame, amid which nearly all his goods and chattels perished, for fire-engines were unknown in that remote region of the British empire.

Stretched on the ground, not far from the door, surrounded by a crowd of wondering and pitying boors, lay Major Carysfort, covered with blood, and to all appearance dead.

There rushed through the mind of Douglas a strange tumult of mingled thoughts.

"What new horror is this?" he exclaimed, as he knelt beside the body of his successful rival. "Carysfort dying! How shall I break this to poor Fanny? Shall I, of all men, break it at all, or you, Haddon? How will she receive it?"

Douglas felt the major's pulse. How often during his career of service and bloodshed had he done this to a comrade's wrist, calculating by the ebb of the life-current how long they might be spared to each other.

"Thank heaven, he still lives!" exclaimed Douglas, thrusting aside any ungenerous thought. "But, poor souls, this is a terrible commemoration of your wedding day."

Douglas was truly worthy of the name he bore, and the grand old line from whence he came—the "Douglasses, tender and true," of the old Scottish warlike times. He had their proverbially dark eyes and somewhat swarthy skin, which they inherited from Sholto Dhu Glas, the dark-haired man of the old Hebridean battle field.

But we were now to learn the most terrible calamity of the night from the lips of the pale and bewildered Van Bommel, for, on looking about for the ladies, the honest Dutchman while wringing his hands with tears in his eyes, informed us that "they had been carried off by the Cape Mounted Riflemen, who had mutinied, plundered his house, set it on fire,

and joined Mark Graaff, under whose ruffianly hands the major had fallen."

Now, to our distress and utter dismay, we saw the snare into which we had been drawn.

The attack had been confined to the remote house of Piet van der Meulen simply to lure us from guarding that of Van Bommel, for doubtless Mark Sharkeigh had been duly informed of all our arrangements by that treacherous scoundrel, Adrian Africander, against whom I registered in my terrified heart a stern vow for vengeance.

But what availed it then?

Oh, bitterness supreme! For some time the information of this new catastrophe stunned and bewildered me. It was like a sudden death—it was something beyond the power of conviction or of realisation; so much so that every moment I expected her to appear before me.

"Oh, horror, horror!" groaned Douglas, letting his claymore drop on the ground, while covering his face with his hands, and trembling as if with ague.

To think of those girls, so delicately and tenderly nurtured, so gentle and highly accomplished, pure and highminded English girls—of Clarice, who to me was the embodiment of all that was lovable and lovely in life—being in such hands was agonising and maddening.

Instant pursuit was, of course, our first idea; but we were afoot, while the abductors were all well mounted on fresh troop horses, which had rested during a four days' halt, and Sharkeigh had appropriated to himself the fine charger of Major Carysfort, who, too probably, would never sit in a saddle more.

"In what direction have they gone?" asked twenty voices.

Some said one way, and some said another; but I had not a doubt they would make their way north-eastward to the hills.

A dying bushman, one of the Tronkvolk, left behind his fellows with a bullet in his chest, affirmed that Mark Graaff—he knew not his other name—was the abductor and originator of the whole scheme.

"In what direction has he taken them?" I asked.

He writhed round in his dying agony to indicate, for his voice was gone; but whatever was his meaning, he pointed skyward—a motion of which we could make nothing.

The Highlanders, impulsive, ardent, and enthusiastic, were impatient to be off after them. They threw aside their great-coats and blankets, and all that might impede their advance; and again, at a rapid double, we marched in pursuit, heedless whether we fell into an ambush or not.

Indeed, we had ceased to care for it, or to think of it, as the object of Sharkeigh had too evidently been the abduction of Mrs. Carysfort and her sister. But what was his motive? Revenge on me, simply outrage, or the hope of ransom? Perhaps all these motives together.

As we went on breathlessly and in silence, I felt so benumbed at heart, and so crushed in soul, that tears melted me, and I began to recall the childish prayers my dead mother had taught me long ago, when nightly I had folded my little hands and knelt at her knee; but prayer afforded me no relief, my heart was full of desperate thoughts of rescue and revenge.

Gone! Clarice was gone! torn from me now, and too probably for what a terrible fate! I might never even see her dead remains, or know where, or when, or how she found a grave.

At that very moment what might she and her sister be enduring! My sweet Clarice! How I repented me now of my past silly suspicions of Graves, and the days of my absurd incognito; the reunion delayed, the kisses I had lost—those wonderful magnetic kisses, that from her lips had gone straight to my heart, never, never to be forgotten.

Where were now our schemes of marriage, our hopes for the blissful future? Of what avail were the wealth, the gold and diamonds I had amassed during five years of exile, toil, and peril? All valueless to me now as dross—as the sandy dust of Kalihari or the bubbles on the current of the Keiskamma.

"Of all equalisers there is none like misery." And now Gerard Douglas, in his sorrow for another man's wife, was enduring nearly all that I did for the loss of her I had already deemed my own.

Yet on our departure, and while I was prosecuting inquiries as to the track we were to follow, he, like a good and generous fellow, had bound up and tenderly dressed the wound on the head of Carysfort, whom we left in a state of semi-insensibility to the care of the kind Dutch villagers. His head alone was injured. Luckily, the bullets fired at him by the malcontent Hottentot mutineers had only cut and torn his undress uniform, and sunk into the earth.

In the pursuit we were joined by young Hans van Bommel, and several other active young boors, all well armed, and full of vengeance for the wrong inflicted on the village. Some of them had cutlasses and pistols, and all carried long single-barrelled guns with great flint locks, and each had a powder flask of bullock's horn, dangling at a tasselled cord over his left shoulder and under the right arm, for priming readily.

They were all lithe young fellows, though pure Dutchmen, and were well used to forest life, and to hunting the wild boar and porcupine in the bright moonlight nights, when with dog, bayonet, and spear, they would bring their savage quarry to bay in the deep dark kloofs of the Zum Bergen, and other mountain ranges.

One or two dead or dying Caffres whom we found on the way, here and there a broken assegai, or a warlike crane's feather, and so forth, indicated that we were pursuing the right direction, though we might be far—alas, too far—from those we followed.

The moist state of the road and turf after the recent days of rain, showed us the hoof marks of the Cape escort, who had made a *détour* of a few miles round the village; and after pursuing the common highway for a little distance, had, as I supposed correctly, wheeled off in a north-west direction towards the mountains of British Caffraria.

Even in the starlight the boors and I could track them;



but when day broke the traces, to our sorrow, disappeared, and when the sun arose we found ourselves all but lost in a dense, wild forest, where the only paths were those formed long, long ago by the great feet of the roving elephants, under noble trees of vast size and wonderful beauty, where the mimosa, the willow, and the white thorn mingled, the rich blossoms of the latter loading the air with perfume; and where the black karon, the bustard, the grevil, and the partridge flew before us in noisy coveys and flights. And then at times, too, the springbok, black-horned and white-faced, galloped past us in startled herds, but all unheeded now.

Alas, it was not game we looked for there!

In a part of this wood Sergeant Robert Burns found, to our horror, some human remains lying among the long, rank grass. They were those of a person, or persons, quite recently torn by wild animals.

The sex was undistinguishable to unprofessional eyes; but some rags of female attire that fluttered near filled Douglas and me with sickening terror and dismay.

Round the place where the Highlanders had halted and piled arms for a time, the boors and I made a circuit, and soon struck upon the trail again—the hoof marks, the crushed grass, and broken twigs.

At one place under a willow tree, a kid glove, a veil, or a piece thereof, and a gold bracelet, all lying together, and which we recognised as belonging to Fanny, made us tremble lest some violence had been offered to her there.

On we went, inspired with renewed hope and fury; but long ere we halted, weary and worn, breathless and utterly exhausted, on the western bank of the great Keiskamma River, all traces of those we pursued were lost to us for ever.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

DESPITE the skill and exertions of Hans van Bommel, his brother boors, and myself, no further track or trace could be discovered. An entire day we lingered on the western bank of the Keiskamma River, searching, but in vain.

A long, sorrowful, and agonising conference ensued between Douglas and me, and we came at last to the grim and bitter conclusion that there was nothing for us left now but to commit those we loved to the providence of heaven, while we pushed on to head-quarters and joined the troops in the field. Indeed, Douglas's strict line of duty required him to do so imperatively, as he had been wandering too long with his detachment already, but chiefly in consequence of his guide, the Cape Rifleman, having misled him.

If the boors would have accompanied me, I was not disinclined to have ventured into the bush, in search of intelligence ; but they shrunk from a task so perilous, so I now resumed my former plan of accompanying Douglas, and joining the field force as a volunteer, inspired only by the emotions of desperation and revenge.

"If, by the general's permission, a flag of truce were sent to Sandilli, to inquire into the fate of the two captives, I would gladly be its bearer, and for such a duty none could be better fitted than I."

"But a flag of truce to such utter savages !" urged Douglas.

"True, true," said I bitterly.

It did seem a hopeless errand, certainly ; but I thought much might be achieved by one accustomed to five years' wandering in the land of the boors, and even far beyond its dangerous frontier.

If the sisters were surviving even when that attempt was made, what might they not have endured from toil, privation, heat, and exposure ? Fever was, perhaps, the smallest human ill ; but more than all, what might they not have suffered at the hands of such men as those who possessed them ?

It seemed but as last night since Douglas and I met so strangely and for me, so opportunely, in Hell's Kloof ; but long ages seemed to have elapsed since Clarice had been torn from me—since I last looked upon her face and heard her voice—yet barely twenty-four hours had elapsed.

All was chaos, all confusion, in my mind ; but we never ceased to deplore the jealous folly of Carysfort in bringing

his wife to the front at such a perilous time, and thus causing the too probable destruction of her and her innocent sister.

The Dutch boors, who had accompanied us thus far, now bade us adieu, and we resumed our route towards the army.

On the third day of our march we entered the Ecça Pass, "the terror of waggon-drivers and post-riders, and notorious as the scene of many fatal ambuscades."

There the road winds along a narrow kloof, between steep and lofty hills, covered with dense thorn bushes. On one side, high rocks ascend, perpendicular as a wall; on the other yawns a profound abyss. Many an unsuspecting traveller, trader, and trek-boor, and even many an armed escort, have perished there, shot down helplessly from chasms and crevices in the unapproachable cliffs.

Boulders and fallen masses of rock encumbered the way, and what were more obnoxious still, heaps of whitening bones, and shrunk or sun-dried skins, the remains of cattle that had perished of thirst. Here and there, foully tainting the air, lay the carcasses of half-devoured horses, from which the gorged vultures arose in angry flights as we drew near them. Nor were one or two human skeletons wanting to complete the striking picture, for within a month a mounted express party had all been waylaid there and murdered by Sandilli and his men.

But all was lonely and quiet as we threaded the formidable pass, and nothing was stirring there but the dossies, little animals of the rabbit species, with rats' heads and apes' hands, which skipped from bush to rock.

Ere long we heard the welcome sound of drums, and on turning an angle of the perilous road, where it went acutely round a projecting and overhanging mass of rock, an exclamation simultaneously escaped us all, when we came suddenly in sight of the whole field force of General Somerset, the long columns of infantry marching by sections, with bayonets fixed and colours cased; the cavalry with all their appointments glittering; the wild-looking Fingo and Bechuana levies, with musket, assegais, and horn; the waggons with

their smoking teams ; the cannon, pack-horses, and so forth, winding far along the hillside, through the brilliantly coloured bush, the greenness of which was varied by beautiful euphorbias as large as the greatest forest trees.

The troops were in advance of us by several miles, and it was not until evening fell, when, after quitting the Ecça Pass by a steep, rough road, we overtook them while halting near Fort Browne, a lonely, quadrangular fortification, which stands close to the Great Fish River, and overlooks a sandy and barren district studded with wild thorn bushes.

The native levies were the first we passed—Fingoes, who are a tribe darker in skin and distinct from the Caffres, who keep them in a state of slavery ; and next the Bechuanas, with whom we were in alliance, and natives divided into many tribes, each clan, like those of the Scottish Highlanders, having its own hereditary chief. Frank and sociable fellows are those dusky Bechuanas, but exceedingly tenacious of their national customs.

All the savages were led by British officers, whose duty was certainly not to be envied, as they were incessantly fighting among themselves, and using their knobkerries, or war-clubs, on each other's woolly pates without mercy.

After passing their wild and disorderly camp, we were received with some interest as we marched past the lines of the Cape Rifles and Caffre police, and then through those of the 6th Royal Warwickshire, 73rd Perthshire, and the 91st Argyleshire, to where the 74th Highlanders were posted, and then to Lieutenant-Colonel Fordyce. Douglas made a report of his march, of his having been misled, his being joined by Major Carysfort, and of the disastrous affair of the village.

"You but confirm a rumour of a very unpleasant nature," said the colonel, a pleasant and gentlemanly officer, who fell in action soon after ; "a Hottentot deserter from the Cape Mounted Rifles was taken yesterday by the Caffre police, to whom he gave information that two white ladies—Europeans—were in the hands of Sandilli, into whose camp they had been brought in a very exhausted state by the followers of Mark Graaff"

"Oh, heavens !" said I. "And the camp of Sandilli—"

"Is in the rear of his position—the Amatola mountains," resumed the colonel ; "but nothing more could we learn, for the Caffre police, who are somewhat rapid in their measures, had the fellow shot and buried in less than five minutes."

The scarlet uniforms of the four British regiments had all been relinquished for dark blouses of canvas, and for service in the bush they had been supplied with feldt-schoen, as worn by the colonists, broad leather peaks to their forage caps, and light pouches of untanned leather.

"Allow me, colonel, to introduce an old friend of mine—Mr. Haddon, late of the —th Fusiliers," said Douglas, leading me forward. "He is anxious to serve with us as a volunteer, and being celebrated as a hunter and bushranger, he will prove a useful addition to our ranks."

The colonel held out his hand, and bade me welcome, saying, I "might attach myself to Douglas's company at once."

His detachment of soldiers now joined their various companies. Gerard found himself free, and a crowd of officers belonging to the 74th and 91st Highlanders gathered around him, and all, unaware of the anxiety in which we were plunged, poured forth a torrent of thoughtless questions.

"Welcome back to headquarters, Douglas," said Bonteine, of the 74th, a gay-looking young officer ; "though we have something brisker to do now than shooting quails, and practising to toss the assegai, *à la* Caffre."

"So you have come to take pot luck with us at last," said another, "and had some fighting on the way up from the rear, it seems?"

"Yes, at Hell's Kloof, where I saved my friend from Mark Graaff, and a night or two after in a valley where he potted some of my sentries."

"And how about *la belle* Carysfort—the golden-haired Fanny, who is such a contrast to her graver sister?" resumed Bonteine. "As usual, I suppose, flirting furiously with the Captain, and mingling her sighs with the staff. By Jove, that girl gets well through her time!"

If a glance could have slain, the dark eyes of Douglas would have slain the heedless subaltern.

"Hush, for heaven's sake, Bonteine," said he. "You know not what you say."

"How so, Gerard?" "Why?" "What the deuce is up?" asked three others.

"Bolted—eh? With whom?" asked Bonteine.

"Silence, Jack," said Douglas angrily. "She and her sister, too, are prisoners in the hands of the Caffres, if they are alive, and even if so, heaven help them, poor things, heaven help them!"

"In the hands of the Caffres?" exclaimed all together, while the varying of their voices and the changed expression of their faces evinced the deep interest, astonishment, and commiseration with which these tidings were heard.

Douglas and I narrated all that had taken place, and though Carysfort was universally condemned for his rashness and folly in bringing ladies even so far to the front as Graham's Town, the greatest compassion and sympathy were expressed for the too probable fate of Clarice Haywood and her sister.

My idea of a flag of truce I found to be universally condemned as being rash, wild, and beyond the comprehension of the Caffres, who it was averred would inevitably destroy any one approaching their lines under any flag whatever; so we could but hope that when we attacked them, and stormed the Amatolas, some trace might be had of the unhappy girls who were in their hands; but as if to add to the poignancy of my fear and sorrow, I could gather from the remarks freely made around me that the chances of their even being permitted to live were slender indeed.

The officers of the 74th now proposed to have some refreshment after their long march through the Ecce Pass. Their servants produced some boiled coffee, with ration beef and black biscuits, after which a small cask of very fine madeira, which Bonteine had found in a deserted kraal, was set abroach, and Douglas's comrades—and mine, as I now deemed them—resolved "to make a night of it."

Soldier-like, they soon dismissed all recollection of the subject which weighed so heavy on my soul in the merriment and barrack-room "chaff" that ensued on the "co-equal delights of women, wine, and tobacco."

Jack Bonteine in particular was noisy and heedless, for although a Scotsman in blood and name, he had very little of the Scot in his temperament or bearing.

"You have seen much of the world, I presume," said I, after some remark of his.

"By jingo, I should think so—India, China, Canada—all that an officer can see; but it's all bosh—there's nothing in it," replied the heedless fellow. "It has taught me one thing, however."

"And that is?"

"Ability to digest such tough ration beef as this, and such ammunition bread, without the aid of any pills."

"A few months ago, when at Cork, we had little thought of being here, Mr. Haddon," said Archy Campbell, a tall and fair-haired 74th man. "Supposed we were for Old Gib or Hull."

"And so you came by Graham's Town, Gerard?"

"Of course, Bonteine."

"Did you look up any of the fellows in Fort England?"

"No."

"Too busy among the fräuleins, with their thick ankles and yellow hair—eh?"

"You are wrong, Archy," said Douglas gravely. "I had something else to think of."

"By Jove, you have come back to us quite sulky, Gerard," persisted Bonteine. "What's up with you? Are some swell friends telegraphing to the Horse Guards in your favour—or what?"

"I have had thoughts of my own, Jack—thoughts in which you cannot share—to make me sad enough."

"Oh, in that case, I beg pardon," said Bonteine. "You have been at Malta, I suppose?" he added, turning to me. "I remember your regiment lying there with ours."

"And so do I," interposed a smart little ensign, before I could speak. "The tiny, black-eyed women are pretty there, and wear their black lace faldettas most becomingly. Their husbands, though hospitable enough, are not very accommodating. However, the signoras know enough of the Queen's English to understand the language of—shall we call it love?—yes—or flowers."

"Here's a little reprobate fresh from school," said the doctor of the corps, with a severity that was not all mockery.

"You are right to—aw—aw—snub him, Doctor Fawbs," lisped Graves.

"You be hanged, sir," said the doctor, turning bluntly to the startled Guardsman. "My name is Forbes, and I'll allow no Scotchman in his snobbery, or Englishman in his ignorance, to caricature it."

Graves, astonished by the Scotchman's caustic temper, raised his eyebrows superciliously, and shrugged his shoulders.

And as the evening passed on, and the abduction of those so dear to Douglas and to me were forgotten amid heedless merriment, while the madeira cask was trundled from hand to hand, and endless jokes were made about Bob Jones, the adjutant of the —th, whose wife, on his return from a long tour of duty, found in his hairbrush certain long golden hairs, that could never have belonged to his grizzled pate, and what a jolly row she made about it, writing a long letter to her father, the rich woolstapler, demanding a separate maintenance; but the said letter being posted by her Irish servant, Lanty Flannigan, and being underpaid, he had cut the four corners off to make it suit the views of the postal authorities as to weight.

From Dr. Forbes, a grave, hardheaded, and intelligent Aberdonian, I learned many new details of the war and the work we had in hand.

Sandilli, the paramount chief, was rather accomplished as a Caffre diplomatist, and had urged upon all the lesser chiefs the necessity of their making a last struggle for their independence.



He had spread among the people an intense dissatisfaction at British rule, and had enlisted the services and the interests of the Umlanjeni, or witch doctors, in whose prophecies and predictions of Queen Victoria's downfall the Caffres placed implicit reliance. He refused to kiss the "stick of peace," though the governor had tried to force him at the head of the 73rd Regiment and a battery of guns.

"Slay and eat," was the cry of the Umlanjeni, and the Caffres, whose usual food is corn, roots and milk, resorted to animal food as a stimulus to ferocity, and rose in rebellion, committing dreadful outrages all along their frontier. At that time it was known that they possessed three thousand stand of arms, six millions of ball cartridges, and half a million of assegais.

Terror spread. The farmers almost entirely abandoned their kraals, and with their families sought shelter in the towns or forts, and the roads became impassable from the quantity of stock driven in. Near Fort Cox, the 91st Highlanders soon came to blows with Caffres, of whom they shot two hundred, but lost two gallant officers and twenty privates.

The Gaikas and Tambookies rose in arms, fifteen thousand strong. Kreli, a chief who could bring ten thousand warriors into the field, only waited a favourable opportunity to do so; and along the ridge of the Amatola mountains, under Sandilli, were now a vast armed force of Caffres—how many thousands we knew not as yet—in position against us, and that position I knew must be forced before I should learn tidings of Clarice and her sister.

I longed for the hour of attack, for I had no other object in joining in the contest. My waggon, with our baggage, the soldier's kits, and other *et cetera* left behind, came into camp next morning, driven by Speke van Bommel himself. In it were many relics of the lost ones, and the sight of those things filled my heart with an agony in which Douglas fully shared.

Carysfort was slowly, very slowly, recovering, the old Dutchman said; but nothing more had been heard at the village of

the two ladies, so all our hopes of learning more were based on our successfully storming the position of Sandilli.

### CHAPTER XXV.

THE attire of the 74th Highlanders and also of the 91st was smart and serviceable, though to look a hero in the uniform of the British line—"that specimen of how far the force of docking and beggary can go—that cramping of the limbs and curtailing of the proportions of man—that grotesque contrivance to scrape the human figure down to the shape and smoothness of a carrot"—is impossible.

A regimental blouse and pair of Campbell tartan trews, a Kilmarnock forage cap, and a pair of feldt-schoen were speedily provided for me by the quartermaster of H.M.'s 74th Foot, belts and a rifle were given me, and a few days later saw me a volunteer, *pro tem.*, serving, without heed to pay or promotion, in Douglas's company, and on the march towards those hostile mountains where all our hopes were centred.

For some time prior to this all had been preparation in the camp, and early on the morning of the 24th of June the 74th Regiment crossed the border of British Caffraria.

Our route lay over those level and grassy plains at the base of the Kroutzes, on the summits of which we could see the Caffres watching our advance below.

There the Cape corps made a dash and recaptured some forty head of cattle from a party of Caffre marauders, of whom they shot three or four while riding at full gallop.

As we marched along I stumbled over the corpse of one of them. I merely gave the body a casual glance as I stepped over it; but the next moment a cry escaped me, when I saw among the strings of beads and tigers' teeth which encircled the brawny neck of the savage, a European ornament—a gold necklet—the necklet of Clarice.

In an instant I stooped and possessed myself of it, and surveyed the grim savage sadly, earnestly, wistfully. His tongue might have told me all the terrible secret of the sisters' fate; but it was still now—yea, still as death could make it,

He had been shot through the head, and the bullets had completely shattered his left temple, for the Hottentots of the Cape corps often fired both barrels at once.

Douglas suggested that the discovery of the precious relic need not add to our apprehension, as it was probable enough the two hapless prisoners would be plundered of all their ornaments, perhaps even of their clothing.

After marching almost continuously for two hundred and fifty miles, we halted one evening on the bank of the Quesana River, and pitched our tents at last in sight of the beautiful Amatola mountains, the "Gibraltar of the Gaikas," which arose in dark and purple masses against the sky, as the hot sun of southern Africa sank behind them in a flood of crimson light.

Now the headquarters of Sandilli were before us.

My eyes wandered in keen interest from peak to peak. Did those of Clarice Haywood and Fanny Carysfort see the same mountain range on which we were looking now, or had death sealed their beautiful eyes for ever? A death of shame and of torture, too, perhaps.

I gazed again and again on the slender gold chain that had once encircled the adorable neck of her I loved, and my heart seemed to sicken and my eyes actually to fill with tears of rage and apprehension. But, alas! before long I was to have the presence of Clarice brought more vividly, strongly, and even tangibly before me, than even that slender necklet could do it.

Next forenoon several Caffres were killed in an encounter with the Mounted Rifles, and their huts and kraals were set in flames and destroyed.

That night Douglas and I were seated in his tent somewhat moodily, talking at intervals over the subject of which we never grew weary—the chances of our lost loves being safe and recaptured. The darkness had gathered densely round our guarded camp. On the slope of a gloomy and distant hill the flames were burning redly and brightly, where the Cape Rifles had set on fire the kraals of the Gaikas, and the

howling of the wolves and jackals grew louder every moment.

"Pleasant idea to be wounded and left in the rear of advancing troops with animals howling about the field," said Douglas. "Listen to the howling of those horrible beggars, Dick."

"Do you mean the fellows in the next tent, or the jackals alone?" I asked sullenly, for the merriment of others nettled me.

"Faith, I might say the same of both," rejoined Douglas, "for there is a jolly noise in Bonteine's tent, certainly; but Jack enjoys a perpetual row—can hardly keep silent even when under arms."

The tent of that jovial officer adjoined ours, and there, by the light of a guttering tallow candle, placed in the socket of a bayonet, which was improvised as a candlestick with its blade stuck in the turf, he was entertaining a party of guests, each of whom brought with him his own tin-tot, canteen and biscuits; and during a pause in the merriment, the mellow voice of Archy Campbell was heard singing a well-known military song.

Just as it was concluded, and we were about to join this party or one of the many groups of officers who, in pea-jackets or blanket coats, were gathered round the camp fires, where they lounged on the grass, smoking and watching the steaming camp kettles of hot coffee, the servant of Douglas, a grave and sombre Scot, named Robert Bruce, appeared at the triangular door of the tent, and presented me with a packet sealed up in a half sheet of an old *Cape Argus*. It was directed to "Captain Haddon," and the wax bore as seal the unpleasant impression of a large and coarse thumb.

The packet felt soft and pulpy, and I paused before opening it.

"Bruce, from whom came this?" I asked.

"I received it, sir, from the corporal of the outlying picquet."

"And who gave it to him?"

"One of the advanced sentries, sir, to whom it was given

by a man in the uniform of the Cape Mounted Rifles, and whom he strongly suspects to be a deserter."

"A deserter? Why?"

"Because he had no other arms than a couple of assegais, and after speaking he immediately disappeared by plunging into the bush."

"Suspicious, certainly."

This was all strange, but I tore the packet open.

"Hair! Human hair, by heaven! The hair of Clarice!" I exclaimed, as a quantity of that bright chestnut hair—those soft and silky tresses which I had kissed and caressed so often—appeared before me. "Good heaven what can this mean, Gerard?"

"Perhaps this letter will explain," replied Douglas, in a voice that, like my own, was hoarse and weak with apprehension, as he stooped to pick something from the ground. "It fell out as you opened the packet, and it is addressed to you, Dick."

"Open it, Gerard, and read," said I, trembling in every limb, while a dimness came over my sight.

Douglas knelt on the grassy floor of the tent, close by our candle, which was sputtering away in the socket of Bruce's bayonet, and read as follows:—

"This here hair enclosed is for you, Captain Haddon. You knows well enuff whose head I cut it off, and the head itself shall follow, and the body, too, j'int by j'int, perhaps, unless you pays over to me the sum of two thousand pounds, in good rix-dollars, or English gold, to be delivered to a Gaika as I shall send for the ransom. I have your two friends safe enuff, and far enuff in rear of Sandilli's army to keep them out of your reach for ever, if I choose. So no more at present but remains, as you deserve,

"MARK SHARKEIGH, *alias* GRAAFF."

"The scoundrel!" I exclaimed, in a voice, the hollowness of which startled even myself. "The double-dyed scoundrel! He is quite capable of putting his threat in execution. Oh, Clarice, Clarice!" I added, kissing the hair, and stroking it with a tenderness that was almost fatuous. "I would give

twenty thousand—yes, every farthing I have in the world to ensure your safety, my darling !”

“Perhaps they are safer with this man’s gang than if with Sandilli,” suggested Douglas.

“Can you think so, after all the horrible crimes this half lunatic has committed since he escaped to the bush, where he has been known under the colonial name of Mark Graaff?”

“True,” said Douglas mournfully.

“An outrage more or less—a life taken more or less—are as nothing to him ; and then Clarice and Fanny are so lovely—so lovely, Douglas, and so helpless.”

“We must seize the Gaika woman,” said Douglas, twisting his moustaches, and grinding his teeth. “Seize her, and force her under terror of death to confess all she knows, and perhaps we may get a party of the Fingo levy guided to the spot where the girls are detained. But see, there is a postscript written on the other side of that dirty piece of paper.”

“True—so there is.”

It ran thus—

“P.S.—If my messenger, the Gaika woman, is took, or detained, or followed, worse will befall old Haywood’s daughters *than has befallen them yet*, so look out, Captain Haddon. I haven’t forgot that tap on the head as you gave me on that day I was poachin’ in Teviotdale.”

This postscript added to the horror and apprehension we had that something terrible must have been undergone by Clarice and Fanny, and that even the slender hope of turning the capture of the Gaika woman to account was baffled now. He took his measures to torture me well.

I sat in a stricken and almost stupefied condition, staring at the tresses of hair, and twisting them round my fingers lovingly, while they brought her soft face, her gentle presence and her thrilling voice more vividly to memory than even the gold necklet had done yesterday.

When these had been cut from her head was she dead or alive? I often asked myself this, for my mind was perplexed

by intense horror. She might already be dead, and abandoned by those wretches to the jackals. All her sorrows and sufferings might be over—things of the past—while her beautiful hair was only sent to me by the infamous bushranger as a lure, a taunt or a means of extortion.

Amid these thoughts I was roused by the voice of Burns, who was on duty as orderly sergeant, and who said respectfully, as he appeared at the tent door—

“All light and fires out at seven this evening, Captain Douglas. At five in the morning the division will get under arms, without sound of music or bugle, or any noise whatever.”

“Very good ; that will do.”

He raised his hand to the peak of his cap, and wheeled off to the next tent in succession to repeat his orders.

While in every other tent the anticipated attack was the subject of deepest interest and animated discussion, Douglas and I had a topic nearer our hearts, and far into the dark hours of the long night we talked of it, as we lay on our pallets, with our uniforms on.

Sleep or utter weariness was at last just overpowering me, when Bruce, the Captain’s servant, appeared in heavy marching order, with his greatcoat rolled on the top of his knapsack, his kettle strapped thereto, and wooden canteen by his side, armed and accoutred for the march, to make the welcome yet inexorable announcement—

“Gentlemen, the regiment is falling in.”

“Is our pack-horse ready?” asked Douglas.

“Yes, sir, and loaded with your patrol tent, camp-kettle, and three days’ provisions.”

“All right, Bruce. Chuck on the pallets and plaids, give me my claymore, and now, Dick Haddon, to begin the game of vengeance in earnest.”

## CHAPTER XXVI.

LEAVING behind us a camp guard of three hundred Infantry under a captain, the division under Major-General Somerset

fell in by regiments and brigades. In perfect silence the companies were inspected by the imperfect light of the early morning ; the words of command were issued in a low tone ; no drum was beaten, no bagpipe or bugle blown, as we marched to the base of the mountains, and commenced the ascent of the Western Amatolas.

I felt reckless of my life, or, if I valued it at all, it was only that I might live to learn the safety of Clarice and her sister, or to avenge them fearfully if they had perished.

Sharkeigh and Adrian Africander I marked out specially for death, and had generally vague ideas of showing no quarter whatever to any Cape Mounted deserters who fell in my way, for, had all the men of that corps been loyal and true, the abduction had never taken place ; but now, as we marched on, unpleasantly enough, the recent surmises of Douglas as to being wounded or killed, and left to the maws of the wolves and jackals, occurred to me, though a secondary evil so far as I was concerned.

Amid that armed host then ascending the mountains I alone, perhaps, had any deep personal interest in the strife. Officers and soldiers alike knew that the war in this remote region was one which excited little interest in Britain, and none whatever in the rest of Europe ; they knew that they had to endure toil, privation, and suffering, the risk of wounds and death in fighting vast hordes of brave and well-armed savages, from whose conquest little honour ever accrues, nor would one badge be added to the many on their colours, won on the more brilliant battle-fields of civilised countries. Yet the British soldier is not given to repining, so all marched steadily and cheerfully on.

Day broke with tropical rapidity, and through clouds that were like mighty bars or flakes of gold and purple sheen, the sun came up in all his glory, just as our brigade reached the summits of the western ridge, and deployed into line along them, with all our colours waving in the morning breeze.

The third colour of the 74th was unfurled in the centre of the regiment for I here may mention that, like the 78th



Highlanders, the corps carries three—one being in memory of the field of Assaye, an honour conferred on no other battalions of the line.

The Caffres, in moving clouds, covered all the slope of the Victoria Heights at some distance on our right flank, and while the general, with a party of the doubtfully loyal Cape Mounted Rifles, galloped forward to reconnoitre them, we were halted, and could look quietly on.

Between us and the position of Sandilli lay a beautiful valley of the most brilliantly green grass, studded with clumps of darker foliage—the protea, mimosa, and tulip tree. On our left flank rose the steep and conical peak, named the Hogsback, the most lofty of that mountain chain. Below it yawned a deep ravine or kloof, covered with dark and dense forest trees, through the centre of which a cataract, white as snow, tore on its passage to the Keiskamma and the Indian Sea.

On the opposite side of this lovely valley, and all along the lower ridge of the mountains, the smoke of the Caffre camp-fires curled into the blue sky slowly and grayly upward from the dark scraggy bush and steep rocks that indicated and protected their position; and the flash of steel came brightly forth at times from a thousand points as the sun's hot rays were caught on a musket barrel or the blade of a weapon.

We could see that the general, after reaching the southern point of the range, had a brisk fire opened upon him and his party. From hundreds of points the white jets or puffs of smoke started out of the green woods, and we saw the horses of the Cape Rifles prancing and plunging as their riders returned the fire.

Immediately on this taking place, two companies of the 91st Highlanders and three of the European and Fingo levies went forward at the double, under a lieutenant-colonel of the Rifles, while the general returned to the main body.

"Well, Calder," said Douglas to the little ensign who had spoken so flippantly about Malta, "you are about to be under fire for the first time."

"But not the last, I hope."

"And how do you like the idea?"

"I would rather face a cannon-ball, or an assegai, or anything, than endure one hour of Euclid, Straith's 'Fortification,' quadratic equations, Vauban, or any of the other bores of the Sandhurst curriculum."

"It will all be as nothing one hundred years hence," sang Bonteine, while practising several cuts with his sword on a prickly pear.

"Silence, if you please, gentlemen," said Colonel Fordyce, shortening his rein. "Here comes an aide-de-camp."

At that moment Percival Graves, with all the fuss and *empressement* peculiar to the staff officer, whether at a fight or a field-day, "Looking a little white about the gills, however," as Bonteine said, galloped up to our brigade, and reining his horse sharply back upon its haunches, paused ere speaking, for he was almost breathless.

I smiled bitterly at myself on recalling the hours of jealousy he had caused me elsewhere; now when I looked up at him from the flank of Douglas's company, where I stood in my place, to all appearance a private soldier.

"The—aw, aw—brigade is to advance, colonel," said Graves.

"In what direction?"

"Forward into the valley; the cavalry and pack-horses are to move by the—aw, aw—left, where the descent is less steep."

In obedience to this command our brigade advanced in line, descending, in a somewhat scrambling fashion, the steep slope, and when we reached the grassy bottom, "Form columns of subdivisions" was the order, and in this formation we crossed the valley to the bank of a stream, and then found that our part of the game was drawing nigh.

The enemy's position, which we now saw to be a ridge of apparently impregnable rocks, rose sheer as a wall or rampart from the steep, bare slope of the mountains which were there smoothly scarped by the hand of nature. There was

but one point in which the general found an assault practicable, and all along that terrible ridge, quietly awaiting our attack, we saw the dark bands of Sandilli clustered in thousands, their muskets, knives, and steel ramrods flashing incessantly in the sun.

"To you, 74th, I assign the glory of attacking the most dangerous point," cried the general, waving his cap, as he galloped past us.

We rapidly deployed into line.

"Forward, men," cried Colonel Fordyce, brandishing his sword. "Forward, and mount the hill like true Highlanders."

With a hearty cheer the regiment responded, and dashing through the stream, began in a semicircular line to advance up the mountain slope, which an officer has correctly described as "bare and slippery as the roof of a house."

The heat of the sun was like that from the mouth of a blazing furnace, and there was not a breath of air in the open valley or the dark forest beyond. We could hear the hard breathing in the ranks as we pushed upward, and as yet the only firing that had taken place was when Colonel Sutton's little column was briskly assailing the left of the Caffre position.

Those in our front allowed us to come almost within half musket-range before, from the shelter of their formidable natural fortress, they opened a dreadful fusilade upon us. A line of white smoke streaked with flashes of red fire in an instant garlanded the upper edge of the rocks, where we could see nothing of the foe save their black woolly heads, as they popped up for a moment to take aim, and vanished with an exultant yell to reload.

In veritable showers the round balls of the old Tower muskets with which they were armed—balls, twelve to the pound—whistled about us. With many of those muskets I had supplied them in my bartering expeditions, little foreseeing the use to which they would be applied.

The roar of the adverse musketry was repeated by a hundred grand and rolling reverberations in the kloofs and

valleys, as the sound was reëchoed and tossed from side to side.

Perched on the trees at a distance many a vulture looked quietly and ominously on ; but out of a thousand crevices in the rocks before us the baboons, the rat-faced dossies, and even antelopes, fled hither and thither in terror and bewilderment. The blue smoke rose lazily in the calm, hot air from the Caffre rocks, to be continually replaced by more smoke and fire, while the bullets mowed all the turf about our feet, or flattened out like silver stars as they struck the stones and bare places.

Steadily pushing on, while mounting we returned their fire with well-directed volleys from our superior arms, which had, of course, percussion locks, while theirs had the old flints and priming pans. But they were firing downward and we upward, on an angle that speedily became more acute than even forty-five degrees.

For a full quarter of an hour the roar of musketry was deafening, till on drawing near we had in many instances to sling our rifles and scramble upward by hand and knee.

Gravel, with stones and splinters of stone and lead, were dashed in our faces by the terrible fire to which we were exposed. The mess-tins, the rolled greatcoats and knapsacks of the men, were cut and torn to pieces, while the killed and wounded were falling fast on every side, the latter rolling with shrieks and groans, uplifted arms and legs, helplessly down the slope, where often another and another shot struck them, and ultimately—perhaps fortunately—ended their agony.

My covering file was shot through the arm and side, a man on my left had his left hand shattered by a ball, which went clean through the barrel of his rifle. A lieutenant of ours, named Bruce, had an arm shattered, and crawled away fainting with heat and agony combined.

A man near me, who was shot in the heart, uttered a wild and terrible cry as he fell on his face—a cry that seemed to come from a spasmodic corpse.

“Hit by Jove!” cried Douglas, staggering, almost immediate

"Where, old fellow?" cried I, rushing to support him.

"It is only a scratch in the arm here. Tie my handkerchief round it, and Forbes will make it all right by-and-by."

And though he had to clench his teeth with pain, the brave fellow never left the head of his company.

Climbing from rock to rock, and exchanging shots with the enemy at remarkably close quarters, fighting their way upward inch by inch, the 74th Highlanders at last planted their three colours, amid ringing cheers, on the ridge of the Amatolas; but the Caffres gave us no time to use the bayonet as they fled *en masse* in dusky thousands to the shelter of a dense forest in rear of their position.

We were in the heart of their once formidable natural fortress, from which they had carried off their dead and wounded, so no trace remained of them, save a few rusty Tower muskets, powder horns, and bundles of assegais; roasted marrow bones, torn cartridge paper, and vast gouts of blood splashed on the rocks, or still dripping over them, with insects battenning therein amid the sunshine.

We had carried the Amatolas, but unless the Gaika woman came with her message, as I hoped she would do, quietly and mysteriously in the night, I was as far from achieving the freedom of Clarice as ever. But the fierce and new excitement of the conflict had been for a time a relief to me from my aching and bitter, bitter thoughts of her and of her sister; and certain I am that the emotions of Douglas were exactly similar.

I had fired thirty rounds of ball cartridge, and knowing the usual accuracy of my aim, believed that many more than one Caffre had that day learned, under my hand, the great secret of time and eternity. Many of my bullets I had sent where I could detect a gray crane's pinion—the badge of chieftainship, even as that of the eagle was in Scotland—in the hope that one might reach Sandilli. With frequent loading and casting about, my arms and hands were stiff and weary now.

From the rocky ridge of the Caffre position, I looked sadly down on the green slope by which we had ascended. It was

thickly dotted by prostrate figures in tartan trews and blue blouses. Many a poor fellow lay dying there, thinking of his parents in their Scottish homes, or of the future of his wife and children in this bitter world, rather than of his own in the other—the land of shadows—to which he was now so close and nigh.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

I COULD little foresee how deplorably this day was to end for me.

We had barely drawn breath and looked about us on the crest we had won with such toil and peril, when Graves who was afoot now, as his horse had been shot under him, approached the colonel in haste.

“Fordyce,” said he, with a brief salute, “you are to push forward and clear the forest. Such is the order of General Somerset.”

We knew by experience that this would be perilous work, as every thicket, hollow tree, branch aloft, and jackal’s hole below, may hide for a time the stealthy Caffre, till the whistle or the war-whoop brings a horde of naked savages yelling from the secret ambushade. We disliked the attack more than the open assault we had just made with such success, yet there was nothing for us but to obey.

“Forward !” was the word, after we had reloaded and capped, and with our arms sloped we marched steadily across the grassy tableland between the mountain ridge and the forest.

“Those fiends have the advantage of us again,” said Douglas, for though we could not detect one of them, so artfully and ably were they hidden, they opened a fire upon us, and soon killed several of our men.

Douglas’s wound—which he would not allow Forbes to dress, notwithstanding the heat of the day, till nearly every other wounded man had been attended to—was troubling him severely now ; but, as Colonel Fordyce said, “Gerard was animated by a spirit worthy of Sydney, the soldier of Zulu.”

The colonel had his uniform torn by a bullet, and the adjutant had his havresack rent by another—both narrow escapes. One man was shot through the brain, and fell dead at my feet without a groan; another, who was hit mortally in the region of the heart, uttered that wild and unearthly cry of which I have spoken, and died in a few minutes.

Ping, ping—whizz, whizz—came the balls out of the forest, amid the green foliage of which the light blue smoke was curling; but not a brown Caffre was visible, though we could hear the peculiar cry with which they always taunted the 74th Highlanders.

“Nina ez ’innulo! Nina ez ’innulo!”

Meaning, “Holloa, you tortoises!” from a fancied resemblance between the stripes of the Campbell tartan and the chequer of the tortoises, which abound in their plains or flats, and perhaps also from the slow motions of the infantry soldier when compared to their own baboon-like activity.

We poured a rattling volley into the forest at random, levelling low. Many a tree stem was barked, into others the bullets sank thud; but some found more fitting marks, for though the Caffres always, if possible, carry off their dead, yet never bury them, as we plunged with bayonets fixed into the forest we found seventeen or eighteen lying “grim and gash” in death, while the numerous gouts, or blood spoor, showed where others had fallen.

We afterwards learned that in this skirmish the enemy’s loss had been very great. Several chiefs were among the slain, and the great Sandilli, who was directing his men in person, was nearly taken by three Highlanders, and only escaped by creeping on his hands and knees into a dense and secret part of the bush.

The sudden gloom of the old primeval forest, with its overhead entwining of creepers and baboon ropes, after the fierce white glare of the sunshine, was somewhat perplexing to us as we rushed on in very open and somewhat confused order.

Sometimes our men fired straight up into a tree, where

they could detect a leg or an arm among the branches, and then, with gun and horn, a bleeding Caffre fell crash at our feet.

Driving them before us, contesting every rock and bush and tree, we pushed on through the forest to where the trees became scarcer, and the wood more open ; but even there the ground was studded by enormous masses of detached rock, overgrown with asparagus bushes, round which thousands of baboon ropes and flowering trailers were entwined, with wild vines, thorns, and prickly pears, that tore the clothes and flesh from us ; but on we went resolutely, till the firing died away, and the colonel's orderly bugler sounded the welcome halt, just as darkness was closing.

It was then that a gallant episode occurred among some soldiers of the 74th Highlanders, whose singular conjunction of great or historic names, though common enough in their country, rendered the event somewhat remarkable.

Sergeant Robert Burns of Douglas's company, led on by his own ardour, had skirmished rather too far in advance, and fell, a ball having pierced his leg—almost the last shot fired that evening against us. As he was crawling back towards the halted regiment, a dozen of wild and perfectly naked Caffres started from a cluster of Caffre and hartebeest huts, which we thought were empty, and rushed with yells towards him. Then Douglas and the men who were with him turned to save the sergeant.

Gerard's revolver knocked over three of the Caffres by three successive shots, and the rest, appalled by the aspect of a pistol which seemed calculated to fire for ever, drew back, launching their assegais nevertheless. Corporal William Wallace, a powerful and active man, now lifted Burns on his back, and while his retreat was covered by Privates Robert Bruce and Roderick Murchison, with their bayonets fixed, bore him into the midst of the regiment.

The beehive-shaped huts were then set on fire, without its being known that they were filled with wounded Caffres, whose shrieks, as they were scorched or burned to death, made up a horrible medley of sounds



The regiment now began to return through the forest, to reach the bivouac where the 91st Highlanders, like good fellows as they were, had prepared a repast for us ; and on vine stretchers we bore with us several of our killed and wounded men.

The wound of poor Douglas was now most dangerously inflamed.

"If you should lose your limb—" I suggested.

"Then," said he, with a sickly smile, "I shall have to take to some other trade. Give up the profession of arms, certainly, when I have but one."

Darkness was now increasing fast, and on seeing something white glimmering among the grass near the foot of a tree a little way off—some twenty yards or so on our left—as I was alone and in the rear of the last company, I fell out of the ranks to discover what it was, and found the pale white corpse of a Highlander stripped nude, and gashed by many a hideous wound.

At that moment, a blow dealt me downwards from above, by the hand of some savage lurking in a tree—a blow from the butt-end of a musket or knobkerrie (war-club)—laid me senseless beside the dead man, and for a time I remembered no more.

How long I lay there I know not ; but on recovering sense and power of motion, I could see that the rays of the moon were here and there shining or piercing through the wonderfully entwined roof of leaves and trailers above me.

One beam rested coldly on the sharp features of the corpse beside me, and I could see his glazed eye and his hair shining as it was gemmed by globules of dew as if with diamonds.

I strove to rise, but again sank back powerless. There was not a sound in the forest save the drowsy hum of insect life among the underwood, and the silence was most oppressive ; yet I feared to call for aid, and lay still for some minutes breathing heavily.

While stretched thus helplessly, I heard the flap of wings and a monstrous vulture alighted plump on my breast, and I

could see its sharp beak and its fierce eyes, which glittered like those of a demon, close to my face.

I closed mine instinctively, and as the ominous words of Douglas, concerning the wolf and the raven, came terribly to memory now, a cry like a groan escaped me, and on this the vulture fled with an angry croak.

“Nina ev ’innulo !” said a taunting voice, and on looking up, I saw the tall, dark figure of a Caffre, wearing the tiger-skin kaross and cranes’ feathers—the double badge of power—with a round shield on his arm, a musket in one hand, and a bundle of assegais in the other, standing over me.

Then the horror of a barbarous death, after terrible mutilation, filled my heart, and I gave myself up for lost.

#### CHAPTER XXVIII.

MEANWHILE, how fared it with Clarice Haywood and little Fanny Carysfort ?

Some time after their abduction, and subsequent to our storming the position of Sandilli, and driving his followers through the wood beyond it, as I have recorded, saw them both located in a deserted Dutch kraal, of which Mark Graaff, or Sharkeigh, had taken possession, in a remote part of the province of Queenstown, situated somewhere between the White Kei River and the Zum Bergen, about fifty miles in rear of the Amatolas, and in a flat karoo or plain.

The latter was of great extent, and studded with clumps of pine and mimosa trees, and there the long-legged ostrich and the fiery-eyed hartebeest were visible at times. Sharp-pointed peaks of rugged and fantastic forms closed in the background cleft by many a steep, dark, shady kloof, and endless bush or forest, clothed their sides.

The kraal was in a solitary and secluded place ; the fields where the industrious Dutch boor had cultivated pumpkins, millet, maize, and melons, sweet potatoes and tobacco for the Queenstown market, were now an unheeded waste, where the cries of the night-hawks, the hyena and jackal, or the hoarse piping of the bullfrog, alone broke the silence.

In a chamber of the kraal which had once been a species of dining-room, floored with brick tiles, and having prettily papered walls, now all soiled, splashed, and defaced, the sisters were crouching together on a rickety sofa. The furniture, once neat and handsome, and all European, had been grievously smashed and misused by Sharkeigh and his drunken associates.

In a corner of this room were some sacks of meal and a heap of Indian corn, part of the fugitive boor's stores, of which these robbers had possessed themselves. Sharkeigh himself sat in a corner of the room, drinking and smoking, and eyeing Clarice and Fanny from time to time with a deep smile of malignant triumph. Near the sisters, seated on the floor, was an emaciated Bushwoman, whose form was so attenuated that it appeared like a skeleton covered by a wet and closely adhering cloth of snuff colour. She was nursing a half-Caffre child, a bantling of Mark Sharkeigh's, which she supplied from time to time with goat's milk from an ostrich-eggshell; and during this occupation, ever and anon she would grin malevolently at Clarice and Fanny, for she could perceive that they regarded her with ill-concealed aversion and horror.

As yet no greater outrage than simply carrying them off, making them suffer the extremity of terror, and detaining them as prisoners, had been perpetrated upon the unfortunate girls.

To the dusky Caffre women, Fanny was a greater wonder and marvel than even Clarice, with her glittering golden hair, her slightness of form, and white purity of skin, her singular brilliance and loveliness.

The rich flowing auburn hair of Clarice, or much of it rather, had been cut off and sent to me, as already stated; and the Gaika woman had been despatched to me, with orders to hover about the camp until she could speak with me concerning a ransom for both ladies, otherwise the alternative would be frightful.

They had been duly informed of all this, and were waiting now in an agony of uncertainty and fear, not that they doubted

me, but feared the skill of the ambassadress to carry out the negotiation.

Two days had elapsed, and the Gaika woman had not returned, though she was well mounted on a Cape horse, and the karroo was open and level nearly to the base of the Amatolas.

They sat in silence, broken only by their sighs, and the clatter of the knobkerries of two Hottentots, who were beating out or threshing maize on the tiled floor, until Adrian Africander—who being always of a somewhat amorous nature was not without some special and personal views concerning Fanny—came hurriedly into the room, exclaiming, in an excited manner—

“Baas Graaff—ghroote Baas Graaff—ver damte skellums—der Englanders—allamachtig—ya, ya !”

“What the deuce is up, woolly head ? Have you gone mad ?” growled Sharkeigh angrily.

“Der teufel’s up, indeed ! Sandilli am defeated, and der Schotlanders—tortoises in the striped crackers—are coming on !”

“The Highlanders ?”

“Ya, ya, baas—der Berg Schotten and English roebarges (redcoats). One from the hills would speak with you, baas.”

“One ! A soldier ?”

“No, baas.”

“Who then ? Speak out !”

“The Gaika woman.”

Sharkeigh uttered an oath, leaped from his seat, and left the room, followed by the rascal whilom my attendant.

“Oh, Clarice, what will become of us—what shall we do ?” wailed Fanny for the hundredth time, laying her pretty head wearily on the soft bosom of her sister.

“What can we do, darling, but watch and wait ?”

“Wait for what ?”

“Whatever heaven pleases.”

“I am sick of waiting—among these horrible people too !” exclaimed Fanny, who did not quite realise all their danger.

“Wait

"Pray ! I am tired of praying. I would rather see Fordyce and the 74th, or Sutton and his Cape Mounted Riflemen."

"Hush, Fanny, and don't talk of them—the odious and treacherous Hottentots !" exclaimed Clarice, while her hazel eyes flashed with as much hatred and loathing as her gentle nature was capable of feeling.

"True, sister," said Fanny plaintively. "In the hands of these men we are powerless, and can, as you urge, but wait and pray."

"Yes, and hopefully now, for Sandilli has been defeated, and the troops of the line, and the faithful Fingo levies, are doubtless coming this way."

"There has been a battle fought then?"

"You heard the tidings of Africander."

"Ah, who may have been killed, and who survive? Oh, Clarice!" exclaimed Fanny, "I now repent sorely of ever wavering in my love for Carysfort; but Gerard did, I know, so love me, that after years were past the dear fellow could remember the very colours of the ribbons and dresses I had worn at particular times. Dear, good souls! Shall we ever see them both again?"

"And Dick Haddon?"

"Dick, of course—I don't forget him."

"We may never see any of them, and must be prepared for the worst."

"Clarice darling," exclaimed Fanny, clasping her sister closer, "if our lives should cease to be worth having, if we could never more even look on those who love us most—you understand me, sister?—if we are forced to die—oh, if we are forced to die!"

"Well, Fanny, my sweet one, we must all die when our allotted time comes."

"But, Clarice, I am not so well prepared as you."

"You are sinless as a child, Fanny—a pigeon without gall. But remember we are in the hands of heaven."

"Of heaven?" queried Fanny petulantly, and a little irreverently. "I would that we were, for we seem to be in the hands of Caffres and merciless boors."

"I remember once reading in a book that 'when Adam fell the earth grew dark ; but God, indeed, was still everywhere. Still the great and guilty world rolled on while He held it up, and in His unseen presence His sinful creatures lived and moved ;' and so be assured, Fanny, that God is with us now."

"I would, Clarice, that I had your courage, your hope, your resignation, and keen sense of religion ; but I have none of these, and am, as you see, only a poor little trembler."

Mark Sharkeigh did not return, and the tidings of the defeat of Sandilli so excited the Hottentot servants or slaves, that they abandoned the task of threshing the maize and went forth into the courtyard of the kraal, where others were assembled round Adrian Africander, all jabbering in their native dialect, in broken English, or low Dutch of the most grotesque kind, and smoking the while hempseed, through hubble-bubbles of bullock's horn.

And the sisters sat thus alone, Fanny reclining on Clarice, and both watching with sad and earnest eyes the bright stars of the Southern Cross, as the darkness came round them.

They made no attempt to escape, feeling perfectly certain that any such effort would be hopeless. Though but fifty miles or so from our outposts, they thought the distance much greater, as Sharkeigh, Africander, and the other deserters had brought them to the kraal by a long detour round the right flank of Sandilli's position, and by the base of the Hogsback mountain.

They were afoot now, without means, money, or strength, without escort, guide, or defence, and without a knowledge of the way. The country was infested by wild animals—the wolf, hippopotamus, leopard, and hyena, even the terrible man-eating lion, were all there, and in the open karroo were bands of prowling savages, outlawed half-breeds, and such innumerable perils, that the danger of flight seemed almost greater than that to be encountered by remaining, especially while Sharkeigh had the hope of a magnificent ransom.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

TERROR and the utter discomfort of their situation on one hand, with the slender hope of escape or sudden release on the other, and with these a natural dread of what might ensue, usually prevented the sisters from undressing for the night; and so, seated just where I have described them in that now squalid room, the sisters, who usually slept by turns, had now fallen asleep together, overwhelmed or overpowered by long-continued emotion and irrepressible anxiety, and the night was considerably advanced when Clarice was roused by a heavy hand grasping roughly the arm which encircled the slender waist of Fanny, who had gone to slumber like a child with her head on her elder sister's shoulder.

Starting to sudden wakefulness, Clarice looked up, and saw by the light of the moon, which streamed through the curtainless window, with great brilliance, like a silver flood, the hideous face and ungainly form of Mark Graaff, alias Sharkeigh.

Mark had cast aside his round jacket and waistcoat, as if he had been preparing to retire for the night, but had suddenly changed his mind, which was precisely the case, and now he appeared only in his shirt-sleeves and yellow leathern crackers.

"Oh!" exclaimed Clarice, with a shudder of dread, for she could perceive by a glance that he was partially intoxicated, that his face was flushed, that his lips and the livid scar were awfully pale, and that his horrid eyes were bloodshot.

She knew that one of those boxes, which at the Cape are generally painted red and filled with square case bottles of Dutch gin, carefully packed in sawdust, had been found that morning in a nook of the kraal, and that unlimited drinking had begun among the bushrangers. Clarice thought of all this with terror, and apprehension that her worst fears were about to be realised.

"Has the ransom come?" she asked tremulously.

Sharkeigh uttered an oath that made her blood run cold.

"I have not come to talk about that," said he in a husky whisper.

"About what then, my good fellow?"

"Don't 'good fellow' me, or think to gammon me in that fashion," he growled; "for I am not a good fellow, and you don't think me one."

"What seek you here, then, at this hour?"

"Something I should have looked for ere this."

"And what is it?"

"You yourself, mistress."

"Fanny," began Clarice, in intense agitation.

"Don't rouse her," said Sharkeigh, with a low, fierce, hissing voice in the shrinking ear of Clarice; "don't rouse her, I say, for I don't want her silly squalling to rouse others. Do you understand."

"Oh, sir, what do you wish me to do?" implored Clarice.

"To come away with me, mistress, and come quickly, or—"

"Or what?"

"I'll drag you, that's all," he responded, in a bullying whisper.

"But where do you wish me to go—at this time of night, too?" asked Clarice, in a breathless voice, while an unuttered prayer rose to her lips for some guidance and protection, and even for time to think of the deadly peril that was now so close and nigh.

"Where?" repeated Sharkeigh, insolently mimicking her tone and manner, while again seizing her tender arm and balancing himself alternately against her and on his heels, for his potations had rendered him unsteady. "What does it matter to you where? T'other side of the kraal, that's all."

"But for what purpose?" persisted Clarice, with a little courage that grew out of her utter desperation, and with it came the longing for a weapon wherewith to defend herself.

"You'll deuced soon know," was the surly response; "too soon for your dainty taste, perhaps. But I have something to tell you."

"Tidings from the camp—from Richard Haddon?"

"Yes," said Sharkeigh, gnashing his teeth, for the mention



of my name always inflamed him with a hate that seemed born of insanity.

Upon this assurance, Clarence softly and gently deposited the head of her sleeping sister on a pillow of the dark and discoloured chintz. Her fair waxen face and masses of golden hair made her seem most fairy-like in the clear cold brilliance of the moon.

"Lead on, sir," said Clarice, rising, after lightly kissing her sister's forehead; "I shall follow you."

Passing from the dining-room into the tiled entrance-hall, and from thence under a broad verandah, where were several of Sharkeigh's brother bushrangers lying snoring in drunken slumber, with their rifles and knives beside them, they crossed the courtyard of the kraal, and entered a kind of spacious barn, where there still lay great piles of unthreshed Indian corn and maize, the property of the fugitive boor, and when using that term, I should mention that, though in English it is adopted as being descriptive of a man who is rough, illiterate, or uneducated, in Dutch it simply means a farmer or agriculturist.

Sharkeigh was without any weapon, but a mortal terror seized Clarice when she saw the vast gloomy space of the barn, with all its shadowy uncertainties—a terror that he was about to destroy her in the mere lust of cruelty and revenge, for she had heard and read of such events taking place in barns occasionally.

"What have you to tell me here that could not have been told me by my sister's side?" asked Clarice.

"She'll soon enough know what I have to tell you," said Sharkeigh, with unmistakable leer, as he grasped her wrists. "I begin to get tired of my darkey—my Caffre wife, and mean to have you, do you understand that, eh? And as for Richard Haddon," he added, grinding his teeth, "he sha'n't get even the reversion of you; for living or dead, you shall never quit the bush now."

"But, Mr. Sharkeigh—"

"Mister Sharkeigh!" he exclaimed, as he swung her fiercely

round. "Don't think to gammon me, I tell you ; it won't do. I've been quiet too long," he added, in a bullying tone.

"But the ransom—the ransom !" urged Clarice, striving in vain to free her tender wrists from his rude and felon grasp.

"It will never come now."

"Why—oh, why ?"

"Ha, ha ! Who's to send it ?"

"Captain Haddon promised."

"Haddon is killed, or taken by the Caffres, which is precisely the same thing, so says the Gaika woman, who saw the fight from the Hogsback Mountain. His precious game is played out, and by this time he'll be helping to fatten the jackals and hyenas of the Amatola woods."

"Oh !" mourned Clarice, "is this indeed true ?"

"Ay, mistress ; true as that I now have you here in this barn, and quite at my mercy."

"Why speak you thus of one who never injured you ?" asked Clarice, thinking more of her lost lover than of her own terrible danger.

"Who never injured me, do you say ?" cried Sharkeigh, with a ferocious imprecation. "Who drove me first to bad courses, but those Haddons of Haddonrig ? Who, from a truant boy, punished for robbing their orchard, made a poacher and a gaolbird of me ? and who, from an outcast, made me a thief and a convict, but those Haddons of Haddonrig, with their trespass laws, game laws—their pretended right of shooting here and fishing there ? Who nearly broke my skull in a poaching row ? Your lover, Dick Haddon ! But I have had my revenge. I helped old Prue Grubb with her queer marriage scheme, and passed off a brat of mine as one of hers, and thus did him out of his birthright at home. Here, in Africa, I have carried off his bride, and when I tire of you I may give your heart to the jackals, who have likely had his ere now."

"Oh, have mercy !" wailed Clarice, endeavouring to free her hands from his grasp.

"What mercy had old Halbert Haddon on me when he

drove me out of the country to Liverpool, where I was deprived of my ticket-of-leave, and sentenced to ten years' transportation? Ten years! ten years! How it maddened me to see 'ten years' painted on my cell door, 'ten years' branded on my right arm; 'ten years' were ever in my heart and on my lips, till, with the help of the devil, I suppose, I made my escape and came here—how matters nothing. One thing is sure, I have you fast enough, and mean to keep you so."

Clarice was pale as a lily; her eyes were dilated and her lips parted with terror. She was trembling, and on the verge of fainting, yet out of the very fear of that event she gathered a false courage and resisted with all her strength, when Sharkeigh threw his arms round her, and pressed his horrid, fetid mouth again and again on her pure and beautiful cheek and neck.

Her loneliness and perfect helplessness, instead of winning a grain of pity for her, only served to increase the tempest of evil and desire that glowed in her captor's heart. He daringly ran his coarse hands over her neck and bosom; her hair soon became more dishevelled than ever, and hung over her shoulders. She writhed, panted, and resisted, but as yet dared not to shriek lest she might bring the same terrors upon her sister, or perhaps summon from among the sleepers in the verandah those who would not only witness, but assist in the consummation of her disgrace with exultation and fiendish pleasure.

Seized thus, and by such merciless hands, she could only falter out—"Oh, heaven, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

"Merciful! well, it is more than I will be to you, my fair lady—more than your precious Dick Haddon was, when he well nigh drove in the roof of my skull for knocking over a few miserable birds."

Finding that she repelled him with a strength that astonished Sharkeigh and surprised even herself, he released Clarice for a moment, and eyed her gloomily, while standing between her and the open door, so as to preclude escape. Clarice moaned and covered her eyes with her hands, as if she would shut out her situation like some horrid unreality.

"Come, my beauty, this is all bosh," said Sharkeigh. "Are you like the ostriches on the Karroo, that think if they hide their heads in the sands they can't be seen?"

Suddenly she looked upon him with her hands clasped, and wild entreaty in her eyes.

"Kill me if you will, Mark Sharkeigh," she exclaimed, "but for heaven's sake, and your own soul, degrade me not!"

"This is all stuff," yelled Sharkeigh, gnashing his teeth in a wild way peculiar to himself; "leave such twaddle to parsons and those who believe in them. I have been past redemption long since."

"I am only a woman, weak and feeble; see, here is my throat, place your knife in that and end my misery."

"And what about your sister, eh?"

"Oh, Fanny, my love! my darling! my sweet little sister!" said Clarice, in a sudden gust of keener misery and grief, as the loneliness and the future misery of Fanny came in fancy before her; but Sharkleigh had again seized her, and thrust her furiously among the bewildering heaps of maize and Indian straw.

There was a rushing sound in her ears, a numbness of the heart, a sickness of the soul seemed to come suddenly upon her, and all her strength passed away; but at that moment there rung in her ears a yell, or rather a succession of yells, that shook the rafters of the barn; musket shots were heard, the glow of flames rose in the kraal without, and felled like an ox by a blow from a knobkerrie, Mark Sharkleigh tumbled prone by her side.

Rough hands now seized Clarice. She was swiftly borne out into the court yard of the now flaming kraal, to find herself a prisoner in the power of the Caffres.

### CHAPTER XXX.

So severe was the blow I had received from the war-club or musket-butt of the savage concealed in the tree, that even after consciousness returned to me, some minutes elapsed before I quite realised all the terrors of my situation, and it is

strange that during that time I seemed to hear in my drowsy ear, with wonderful distinctness, a fancied voice—the voice of Clarice—cheering me, and urging me to take courage for her sake.

I was a prisoner in the hands of the Caffres. Consequently I was a doomed man, as they invariably put their captives to a slow and frightful death, after cruelly and mortally mutilating them. Surrounded on all hands, weak, exhausted, and defenceless, I could but stagger up, and gaze despairingly about me.

With all the rapidity of thought there flashed upon my mind much that I had heard of the torture—the fearfully ingenious torture—of prisoners by the Caffres, the lingering three days' crucifixion of many a helpless boor, and worse even than that, the fate of Colonel Mackinnon's party of the 45th Regiment, and of Mr. Hartung, the German band-master of the 74th Highlanders, who fell into their hands near Fort Beaufort.

All the memory of these horrors now made my blood run cold.

Morning was stealing through the tops of the forest trees, and as the tropical sun mounted skyward fast, the tide of light fell gradually from the highest leaves to the lower branches of the giant timber, and all the once gloomy wood became filled with radiance. The suikar-vogels, or sugar-birds, the golden cuckoos, spoonbills, and flamingoes, flew gaily from branch to branch, while baboons and monkeys sprang from tree to tree, chattering, grinning, and cracking nuts, or swinging by their tails, with heads downward, in the air.

Most of the trees here were of the mimosa species, light and graceful in form, with feathery foliage of the brightest green, and golden clusters of globular blossoms, which loaded the air with delightful perfume; but it is a tree rendered singular by the multitude of snow-white thorns, each six inches long, that stud every branch and twig.

Three or four assegais were launched at me, but luckily

missed, and these javelins, which are identical with the zagairs which the Moors used of old in battle, stuck quivering in the green turf at my feet ; but the Caffre who had found me was a chief, and evidently considering me as his property for the time, to keep or kill at leisure, he gave each of those who attempted to molest me a blow on the head with his knobkerrie, making a sound on their thick skulls like that produced by a hard bowler's ball on a cricket-bat.

I was dragged forward to a place where, under a larger tree, with their skins well smeared with red ochre, cicatrised for ornament, and shining in grease for utility in war, the Inkosi and Amapataki—*i.e.*, the chiefs and councillors—of the assembled tribes were arranging the division of a quantity of amazimba, or Caffre corn, which had been retaken from a party of the Fingo levies.

In the centre of these, with his face tied up by a bloody cloth, showing that he had been recently wounded, presided a Caffre, arrayed with shield and sword, the kaross and cranes' feathers, and no less than three rows of tigers' teeth round his neck, together with some of the brass ornaments of the military bridle of Ensign Gill's horse, which had been shot under him in the Eccia Valley, when conveying the Cape Town mail with a rifle escort.

"My poor Clarice," thought I, with a gush of agony, "we shall never know each other's fate !"

I thought mine would soon be sealed, and gazed wearily and wistfully at the hordes that gathered round me in greedy anticipation of a scene of torture and bloodshed.

Giddy, half blind by the recent blow, and sick at heart, the whole scene appeared like a phantasmagoria.

Aware that our troops had retired past the stormed position to the camp in the valley below, the Caffres had no fear of molestation at that time, and in the crowds that swarmed about me there appeared something diabolical in their ferocity of aspect, their blood-smeared visages, their large white teeth, through which they hissed like snakes, while some who were in excellent humour at the prospect of makin~~g~~

mincemeat of me, sang to themselves a guttural chant, and danced with a slow, jerking step to its monotonous notes, tapping the while with their glittering assegais on their shields of tough bullhide.

Before my fate came to be known I had the horror of beholding that of another sealed.

Dr. Hans Bruine Kasteel, of Cradock, the same kind old Dutch medical man who had attended me in my strange illness there, somehow had been taken prisoner; and having failed to cure one of the many daughters of Sandilli of some mysterious ailment, was now accused by the Umlanjeni, or witch doctors, of having cast a spell upon her.

"Mein Gott, mein Gott in himmel, Mynheer Richard!" exclaimed the poor doctor, wringing his trembling hands as he recognised me, though in the bush-fighting uniform of the 74th Highlanders; but we were helpless to assist each other.

He gave me a glance that, like my own, was expressive only of hopelessness or despair, and turned to the presiding Inkosi, whose head and face were partially hidden or muffled in a blood-stained cloth.

Like the other chiefs about him that personage was seated cross-legged, solemnly smoking the dagha pipe—a kind of primitive hookah, made of a bullock's horn, filled with a species of hemp in water, like the maddening and intoxicating *bang* of the Hindostanee. This they imbibed through a stem of reed, let into the side of the horn.

The hapless Dutchman, who spoke the somewhat musical language of the Caffres with fluency, now began with solemn earnestness to repeat again and again that he had done nothing to bewitch Mariqua, the daughter of the great chief Sandilli, but that he had successfully cured her of a fever, while in dread of his own life; that she was now perfectly well, and as a reward therefore he now prayed for his liberty.

I listened to all this anxiously, and while doing so could little foresee the trouble this identical damsel, Mariqua, was to prove to me, in the form of a—*wife*.

He urged his innocence and his claims to gratitude in vain;

the witch doctors of the tribe, who had been jealous of his skill in the cure of one or two musket-shot wounds, were all powerful with the chiefs and councillors, so the work—the pleasure they deemed it—of torture and death speedily began.

I know not whether I ought to relate what I saw ; but as it was the favourite mode of putting prisoners to death, and as I fully expected to perish by the same awful means, the scene made a deep and terrible impression on me ; and yet, though face to face with it, my soul was with Clarice—Clarice, who seemed but a memory now, for our separation appeared a kind of anticipated death, which might be followed, alas ! by no resurrection.

At a given signal at least a hundred willing hands were flung upon the miserable man. His clothes were rent from him, and he stood stripped in the sunshine, the whiteness of his skin forming as singular a contrast to the dark forms of his captors as his round and somewhat paunchy figure did to theirs, which were all bone, brawn, and muscle.

He was dragged to where a fire had been lighted, and then thrown on the grass with his face to the sky, or, rather, to the branches of the trees, which grew so densely overhead as to shut out the blue canopy above.

The Umlanjeni made a last demand that he would produce the “bewitching powders, or show where they were concealed,” and he made a last appeal to the Creator of whom they knew nothing, that he was innocent of possessing any such thing.

I have often thought since that a little tact or art might have saved him, but terror had deprived him of both.

His hands and feet were bound to four strong pegs, which were driven into the ground, and a succession of the flat stones which had been heated in the adjacent fire till red hot were placed upon his body.

A shriek, which I sometimes hear in memory still, broke from the poor Dutchman when the first of these impromptu instruments of torture touched his tender skin ; but so great was the agony he endured that moans—moans which gradu-



ally grew fainter and hoarser—alone escaped him, while the bead drops of profuse perspiration came rolling over his forehead, and I turned away in utter horror of the scene, which lasted for nearly an hour. My heart gave a bound of relief when the report of a musket announced that he had been shot through the head by some savage who had grown weary of the protracted labour of torturing him, and perhaps wished to test my powers of endurance in the same fashion.

After what I had witnessed, the reader may imagine my emotions when the same terrible hands under which Bruine Kasteel had perished were roughly laid on me, and I was dragged closer to the Inkosi and councillors, who during all this episode of horror had been composedly sitting cross-legged, and smoking their dagha pipes.

My forage cap, a common regimental one, with the Scottish chequer round it, was now struck from my head by some mischievous or impatient fellow, whose assegai whistled close by me.

It was then, that on seeing my face fully, the presiding chief uttered a fierce guttural exclamation, expressive of astonishment, and stepping forward threw his well-oiled arms about me, quite as much to my astonishment as to that of his followers.

He proved to be the great chief, Sandilli, whom I had saved from the claws of the tree tiger, and who now recognised and in gratitude protected me.

"My brother chiefs and amapataki," he exclaimed, while brandishing his assegai over my head, in token that he would foster and guard me, "he saved my life from a great and terrible leopard! Behold the marks of its teeth," he added, showing the barely-healed laceration of his shoulder, "and I shall save him now!"

"But if spared he will fight against us again," urged one of the woolly-headed councillors.

"He shall fight against us no more," said Sandilli, with a grin that showed all his teeth.

"How know you that?" asked others, with darkening looks.

"I have a reason," said Sandilli, patting me on the shoulder, while an expression of indescribable cunning stole over his face, and he led me a little way apart from where the remains of the poor doctor were left, pegged to the earth and mutilated, just as I have described them, with the greedy asvogels, or vultures, already flapping their black wings in the branches of the trees above.

When I thought of Clarice and Fanny Carysfort being in the hands of people such as these, I felt life almost valueless, though there was a great relief to my tortured mind in having escaped a death so terrible as that by which the doctor perished. Yet, strange as it may appear, I soon dismissed all thought of the unfortunate Dutchman ; for when one is on active service the sense of danger and the actual value of human life, like sympathy for human suffering, grow less and less every day, from the mere circumstance of being hourly face to face with death.

On the same fire by which the fatal stones had been heated a large iron pot was filled with Caffre corn, boiling for the breakfast of the chiefs, and Sandilli invited me to share it with them ; but I felt overpowered by thirst, after all I had undergone mentally and bodily, and preferred a bunch of honeypot grapes from the nearest bush, on which they were growing wild.

"Fear nothing now," said Sandilli, "you are not my prisoner but my friend rather, and as such shall be protected. He who saved the life of Sandilli must be as the brother of all the Koussie of the Amatolas."

"A pleasant fraternity," thought I, bowing an assent in silence ; but he now proceeded to ask me a number of strange questions ; and as he listened to my answers his large ears seemed to quiver like those of a staghound, uneasily and nervously at the same time.

He was surprised to find I spoke his native language with fluency. But the reason of the latter was speedily explained when more than one chief, with whom in quieter times I had bartered old muskets and ammunition, beads, buttons and

knives for ivory, diamonds, and karosses, recognised in me the once friendly trader.

"Have you a father or mother in your home beyond the sea?" asked Sandilli.

"I have neither, to rejoice for my return or to sorrow for my death."

"They are dead?"

"Yes—years ago—dead."

"That is well," said Sandilli, smiling.

"Why, great chief?"

"Because you may with a lighter heart dwell among the Koussie."

"Dwell here?" I repeated faintly.

"Yes. Remain with me, and I shall give you a wife to make your bosom glad, to hoe the maize for you, and cook for you in your kraal."

My heart sank at this prospect, which seemed to indicate a troublesome captivity.

"Is it true," asked one of the Inkosi, who proved to be Hermanus, a chief of the Gaika tribe, "that the great chief of your nation is a woman?"

"Quite true," said I.

And then all who heard me laughed with surprise and scorn.

"Are her flocks and herds as numerous as mine?" asked Sandilli proudly.

"Perhaps not."

"Wah, wah!" cried all, clapping their hands and striking their shields at this admission of her Majesty's inferiority.

"Are her warriors and people as numerous?"

"More numerous by far."

"How far so?"

"They are numerous as the leaves in the forest, or the blades of grass in the wild karoo."

Utter disbelief was expressed on hearing this.

"Are they all brave, like the Tortoises?" (meaning the 74th) asked Sandilli after a pause.

"Yes, all."

"It matters not—we shall fight them," exclaimed the Gaika chief. "What say you, Caffre warriors, shall we not again go forth and fight these feeble white men? Let us kill them all, even up to the slopes of the Table Mountain, and take captive their fair women and girls, making spoil of all they possess, until the last of them is driven into that accursed sea by the aid of which they first came among us!"

"Wah, wah, wah!" cried a thousand savage voices, while the steel-headed assegais clattered on the shields of tough bull's hide.

But when the clamour subsided, Sandilli shook his head with something of doubt and dejection in his air.

"Chiefs and councillors," said he, "the white sand never rises in clouds so high as when it is just on the eve of being crushed by a tempest of rain. So it may be with our people in this war against the white chief, who is a woman. A year or more may see us completely crushed. We shall fight many a battle ere that time of sorrow comes, yet we may fight in vain, for have we not already been sorely defeated, even here at the Amatolas? It was destined that we should be so, and if the armed tide of the white men must roll beyond even the banks of the Orange River, it is the will of the white man's God, and so His will be done," said the poor savage, with a kind of piety that was completely unintentional.

The whole of Sandilli's force, which I have stated as being many thousands strong, now prepared to fall back towards the valley of the Water Kloof and the Heights of Kroome, leaving the remains of the Doctor to their fate.

Not far from these an old Caffre, whose necklace of tigers' teeth—a kind of savage order of knighthood—showed that he was a brave fellow, lay dying, with three bayonet wounds in his bare brawny chest.

I attempted to place a bandage over these.

"Touch me not," said he spurning me scornfully. "Go, go, and leave me to die in peace. Think you that an aged lion cares for the tending of the jackal?"

So he, too, was left to the beaks of the asvogels, as the whole

horde departed in a north-easterly direction, taking me with them.

All the chiefs were mounted, and Sandilli, in pursuance of his friendship for me, gave me the horse of Pitoi, son of Vonga, who had fallen in action with us during the previous day. Thus the hope of escape began to gather in my heart as we rode on, though every hour of that long and weary day added to the difficulty of the attempt by increasing the distance that lay between my friends and me.

### CHAPTER XXXI.

AFTER many halts, doubts, delays, and again setting forth, Sandilli separated himself from his army, and with a few select mounted warriors escorted me to a remote part of the Amatola country, near the source of the Upper Keiskamma River, where, in a place called the Gulu Valley, stood the Wolf's Den, his own farm.

Near this were the luxuriant gardens of a chief named Sogu, famous—or rather infamous—in this war as the slayer of all the European military villagers of the neighbouring district.

The house was not unlike a snug boor's farm, and had probably once been such. It was furnished with a heterogeneous collection of furniture—ornaments and utensils plundered from many of the Dutch and English kraals that now lay in ruins elsewhere.

Here I found myself many miles—some hundreds, so far as I could reckon—from succour or means of information, deprived of a horse, of arms, and all means of escape, for a chosen party of Sandilli's men, some twenty in number, who were given to me ostensibly as an escort, proved in reality to be my watchful guards, and I was their prisoner.

Every movement of mine was watched by their stealthy black eyes, and every time I went near the stables where their horses were kept, near the garden of the kraal, or a great clump of bamboo-like reeds some thirty feet high which enclosed it on two sides—in short, if I crossed the threshold of the door at least three of them attended me with musket,

knife, and assegai, all of which they handled very significantly.

A week passed away thus, and as I was kept in total ignorance of the movements of our troops, who had marched to Somerset and made a night attack on the Heights of Kroome, I began to find my captivity as intolerable as the food with which I was supplied proved odious, notwithstanding my past experiences as a hunter and trader. There were the flesh of the porcupine roasted in hot wood ashes in his skin—minus the quills of course—jerked elephant, tough wild boar steaks, and so forth ; but with plenty of Cape smoke wine, however.

Even in my own room, which was furnished with an ample but old-fashioned Dutch bed, having a heavy wooden frame laced across with strips of cowhide, and which proved a very comfortable couch to a campaigner, I knew that I was watched, as the woolly head and glittering assegai of a Caffre sentinel were always visible from the window outside all night long.

Sandilli, whom I had not seen for an entire week, now came to visit me, and reminding him of the service I had done him, I begged that he would restore me to liberty—give me a musket, a few rounds of ammunition, a horse, and permit me to depart. Knowing forest life as I did, I had no fear of making my way alone to General Somerset's force.

But Sandilli shook his head, and was grave and even stern in his manner, for during the week he had been absent from the Gulu Valley the Caffres suffered severely when the 74th Highlanders attacked the Water Kloof Heights, and matters were looking gloomy along the whole frontier, so the wily old savage chief was less than ever disposed to part with me, or to abandon his schemes.

Relinquishing for the time all hope of bending him to my views, I then implored him to discover, if possible, the fate of two white women who were in the hands of his people, or those of Mark Graaff, I knew not which.

"Two white women were carried off by him from a Dutch lager village, aided by some of the Cape Corps."

"'Tis they !" I exclaimed.

"And they are now at his kraal among the mountains," continued Sandilli.

"Do you know the place?" I asked eagerly.

"Perfectly."

"Is it far from here?"

"Many Dutch miles. But what then?" asked Sandilli frowning, while adjusting his dagha pipe.

"I could reach them if the men of Macomo or the thievish Amapondas don't anticipate me."

"And if the men of Sandilli will permit you."

"You will surely aid me in saving them?" I urged.

"I shall make no promises. But tell me—is one of those pale-faced amapazi your wife, or are both your wives?"

"No," I replied, and though on the point of telling him that Clarice was to have been my wife, and would be so if heaven spared us, the recollection of his views concerning me inspired me with caution and reserve.

"Then are they your sisters?"

"No."

"Then why this interest in them?"

"They are friends—very dear friends."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing more."

"I am glad that neither of them is the wife of my friend."

He patted my shoulder as he spoke.

"Why?"

"Because, as I told you in the forest, I mean to provide you with a wife from among ourselves."

I could not feign sufficient gratitude for the matrimonial prospect held out to me. When I thought of the Caffre women and Bechuana belles, whom I had seen with their dingy skins smeared in grease and powdered with iron ore, that sparkled like mica—their woolly hair adorned with metallic pendules, and their sole attire a leather apron and a kaross of hide, my mind filled with horror and disgust, combined with anger, at the intense absurdity of my whole position. And yet it was a serious one, for in the end it might be "marry or die."

Nevertheless, I was compelled to dissemble, for the keen,

quick eyes of the suspicious savage were fixed upon me with something of stern yet mocking scrutiny, and he haughtily shook the two pinions of the gray crane which adorned the fillet, or species of torque, which was round his head, as he resumed—

“You shall marry my daughter Mariqua, who is of half Griqua blood, and in beauty she looks a whole one, for the women of the Griquas are, as I need not tell you, more handsome than the women of the Caffres.”

Still the prospect was not an alluring one ; but I could only bow in silence. The idea occurred to me of asserting that I had a wife already at home ; but that would not have made the slightest difference to Sandilli. But I must own to feeling considerably scared by all this, as I soon began to see through the schemes of the chief, who had two cogent reasons for wishing a civilised husband for his youngest daughter—to wit one whose interest might both save and serve him, if, as he greatly feared, the tide of war turned against the insurgent Caffres.

“You shall have a daughter of mine for your wife,” continued Sandilli proudly. “Mariqua was to have been the bride of Pitoi, the son of Vonga, but he was slain by the Tortoises. You saved the life of her father, and for that good deed she shall have you, with all her heart obey you, and shed brightness around your kraal. Forty stately horses and a thousand cattle shall be her dowry, with uncounted spoil to be taken in the war we are waging.”

It is probable that among this spoil Sandilli mentally included the mess plate, baggage, and big drum of the 74th Regiment—indeed, he hinted as much, but still failed to excite my gratitude.

Then, as if the subject was settled and dismissed, he threw aside his kaross, which was made from the skin of a black-maned lion, profusely ornamented with beads and scarlet fringes, and seating himself in an easy chair, wherein whilom some fat boor had been wont to doze and enjoy his postprandial meerschaum, he proceeded to inhale the intoxicating fumes of hemp-seed from his dagha pipe.



My whole situation greatly bewildered me.

I was a helpless prisoner in Sandilli's hands, and that his daughter would marry me in spite of myself I never doubted. The faces of the 74th, of the 91st, of Clarice and her sister, came before me in memory, and I thought of the wonder and amazement of Europeans when they came to hear of the event—Dick Haddon and his squaw.

How could I rid myself of this odious Mariqua?—how save Clarice Haywood?—how escape this absurd and dangerous thralldom? Besides, my sable bride might have a lover, whose poisoned assegai, launched by a jealous and unerring hand from behind some rock or bush, might soon make an end of me.

I sighed bitterly with grief, impatience, and anger, though the soothing reflection did occur to me at times, that fifty, yea, perhaps, twenty years hence, it would be all one, and a small patch of grass would cover all my sorrows and me.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

I LOVED Clarice so truly that this passion made me nervously gentle, tender, and true, and full of fears for how fate would deal with us, and how all would end.

My cravings to escape, and, if possible, to succour her, were intense; but to escape with success a horse and arms were necessary—the latter, at least, imperatively so. The means of procuring both were sedulously denied me; yet I hoped, by dissembling, in the end to obtain both.

After long consultation with myself, and finding that Sandilli was inexorable in his resolution to detain me—a resolution which, if I proved very refractory, he might readily change for the more cruel one of destroying me—I resolved to temporise with him, and to dissemble with the artful savage as the only means of saving my life, and regaining my liberty.

Moreover, he seemed very impatient to have his absurd matrimonial scheme carried out at once, as he was in haste to take the field personally against us once more, for our troops were pressing onward, and to have me despatched

further—more hopelessly as it seemed—into the interior of the country.

Somehow, unhappily for myself, he seemed to view me as a kind of hostage, with whom he feared to part.

“I want neither your horses nor your thousand head of cattle. If I marry your daughter it shall be without these bribes,” said I, when he was urging this matter for perhaps the hundredth time upon me.

“Agreed ; but how will you stock your kraal?”

“With my own hands, if you will but arm me. I shall fight the Tronkvolk of Mark Graaff, and the plundering Amapondas.”

“But you will be the friend of the Amatola Caffres?”

“Yes,” said I, gulping down my intense repugnance.

“Good—wah, wah !” cried the savage chief, as he patted my shoulder ; “but in lieu of the fine horses and the fat cattle—”

“I shall ask you to do me a favour.”

“And the favour once done, you will marry my little daughter Mariqua?”

“Yes,” said I, making a very wry face indeed, as I thought of the dark skin, the woolly head, the greased limbs, and tiger-tooth necklaces of my sable intended, for whom I was to jilt my beautiful and delicate Clarice.

“Then name the favour.”

“You will free and bring hither the two white ladies who are in the hands of Mark Graaff.”

“I shall free them willingly, but I shall not bring them here to the Gulu Valley.”

“Why?”

“You shall neither see nor meet them.”

“Why do you decide thus?” I asked, with irrepressible anxiety.

“I have my reasons,” replied Sandilli, with a louring brow. “These women will be pale as the flowers of the mimosa, and Mariqua is dark, like the girls of the Koussie.”

From this remark, I could plainly see that he feared my intended might suffer by comparison.

"If I free those women," added the wily Sandilli, after a pause, "I shall give them as wives or spoil to two of our young Inkosi."

My blood curdled at this proposition, as I knew but too well that if they had already escaped maltreatment at the hands of the bushrangers, they would next be cast on the mercy of savages who had neither pity nor scruple—the Inkosi of the Caffres.

"This must not be," said I resolutely.

"What if Sandilli wills it?" was the haughty question.

"They must be rescued, and sent in safety to the nearest British camp or lager village, otherwise I shall not marry your daughter. I shall refuse your friendship and alliance, and shall seek only to escape, even at the risk of being cut to pieces, joint by joint."

"And if I do as you propose—save and send them to their friends—what proof am I to give you of having done so?"

"A letter—even the tiniest scrap of paper—written by either of the ladies will suffice as proof."

I struck my hands despairingly together as I spoke, for how I yearned, craved, and longed for the sight of a single word pencilled ever so hastily by the beloved hand of Clarice is known only to heaven and myself.

"Wah, wah, it shall be done."

"When?"

"Immediately."

"May I go with you?" I asked pleadingly.

"No."

"Oh, Sandilli, in gratitude for saving you from death!"

"For that good deed I shall not permit you to risk your life. Sandilli has warriors enough and to spare, and this night shall see the torch planted in the kraal of Mark Graaff."

"This night," thought I. "Then they are nearer this place than I supposed. Oh, Clarice, Clarice! how great is all this misery—how agonising the suspense. Would that I could fly to you!"

On the flyleaf of an old Dutch book which had been

brought in with other plunder—it was Hugo de Groot's "History of Holland," I remember—I wrote an explanatory note to Clarice, entreating her to send a reply as soon as she found herself and her sister rescued and in safe hands ; adding, that I prayed heaven to bless and protect her and Fanny, that I was a captive with Sandilli in the Gulu Valley, and that, unless rescued by General Somerset, as yet I saw no means of escape—in short, my captivity was to be the price of their liberation. I shrank from the shame and absurdity of stating exactly the views of the politic Sandilli.

As soon as this document was written, torn from the volume and folded, it was given to Sandilli, who about mid-day departed with a party of chosen Caffres, chiefly on horseback, leaving me under the close guard of another select band ; and, indeed, I was plainly told by him that any attempt to escape would only ensure death at their hands.

I looked with deep interest and anxiety on his departing troop. I never thought a time would come when I should again regard the Caffres with a friendly eye ; but these men were going to free Clarice Haywood, and a picturesque and striking-looking band they were, with their karosses of black fur, their bare, supple limbs, their wild, gleaming eyes, and jangling necklaces of teeth and metal beads, their round shields, assegais, and muskets, while the gray cranes' feathers worn by some, starting erectly up over each ear, imparted something of the diabolical to the general *tout ensemble*, by the resemblance they bore to Satanic horns.

Slowly passed the day after their departure. I had no idea of attempting an escape at that precise time, as I was intensely anxious to learn the result of this expedition against Mark Sharkeigh's kraal ; and had I attempted to leave the house there were the usual woolly-headed wretches, with their too ready weapons posted all about me.

I looked round, however, for a weapon—a knife, pistol, or anything which might serve me on an emergency—but looked in vain ; the wily Sandilli had carefully removed everything of such a nature beyond my reach. No arms were there, save those in the hands of his own people.

Wearily passed the day, and I watched the shadows falling eastward across the Gulu Valley, as the red sunlight died away from the peaks of the gray cliffs and the grassy mountains which overlook it. Herds of beautiful antelopes swept across it at times on their way from wood to wood, and the cry of the wild pintado came ever and anon from amid the prickly pears which grew there in groves eight or ten feet in height.

Near the kraal of Sandilli were lovely groves, where the citrons, oranges, lemons, and shaddocks grew in countless thousands, bending the branches to the earth; and these groves were watched by little slave boys of the Fingo tribe, who are employed thus by the Caffres to protect the fruit from monkeys, just as our farmers at home have their corn guarded from the crows.

The keen anxiety, the long tension of an overwrought nervous system for days past, since the loss of Clarice, the storming of the Amatolas, and above all, my recent adventures, were telling upon me now; and though I was in a fever of impatience to learn the result of Sandilli's raid upon Sharkeigh's premises, I could not resist the feeling of utter prostration that was stealing over me.

I obtained and quaffed off a bumper of Cape smoke, dashed with brandy, and then, throwing myself upon my bed, sank into profound slumber.

During the entire night I must have remained thus, for the morning of the next day was somewhat advanced when I awoke, with a strange and confused conviction that I had slept but a short time—had only a nap, in fact, and that it was evening still. But it was the morning light I saw; the shadows seemed to linger still in the lovely Gulu Valley; but they fell from east to west, for they were made by the rising and not by the setting sun.

I felt stiff and chilly, though some friendly hand had spread a soft and warm kaross over me in the night. A sound caused me to look up, and I saw seated on the edge of the bed a handsome native girl of very prepossessing aspect, who

was very leisurely fanning herself with a tuft of snow-white ostrich feathers, and watching me from time to time with a cunning twinkle—almost a leer—in her glossy and somewhat voluptuous-looking dark eyes.

She placed in my hand two pencilled notes, and a cry of joy escaped me when I perceived that one was from Clarice and the other from Douglas.

The first ran thus:—

“MY OWN DARLING DICK,—When just about to die, I was saved by whom think you? Sandilli! The kraal was in flames, but dear Fanny and I were taken away by him, and are now safe with a party of the Fingo levy under Gerard Douglas, of all men in the world, and Lieutenant Bonteine, of the 74th. Save for the terror we have undergone, we are quite well, and little Fanny has counted wearily enough the days of our captivity on her white fingers. The Caffre wretches stole her wedding ring.” (If poor Carysfort is gone, thought I, Douglas will soon repair that loss.) “But oh, where are you to receive this, my darling, my own love? Where and when are we to meet again? I must close in haste, as Sandilli’s messenger waits, and Douglas is compelled to march at once.”

Such was the substance of her beloved note, which I read and kissed again and again, greatly to the astonishment of its deliverer.

“Man never is but always to be blest,” thought I. “Where, when, and how shall we meet again Clarice? Well may your heart make the inquiry. Shall I ever escape all these toils, and win you as my wife in a peaceful and happy home?”

Then, as I remembered the odious resolution of Sandilli a malediction escaped me, and I started into a position; but again lay down to peruse the note for the twentieth time, during which the native girl was attentively surveying me.

“So Sandilli makes my marriage with his daughter the

price of the sisters' safety among the Europeans," I pondered "Well, he has kept his promise, and I must keep mine. So that they are safe, what matters my sacrifice for a time—it can only be for a time, surely? Ere long I shall get arms, and escape on the first opportunity. I can but die in the attempt."

The sight of Clarice's well-known handwriting, announcing that she and Fanny were safe—safe at last in our own lines—with the brief expression of her love and alarm for me, made me loathe Sandilli and his project; yet he had my pledge and promise.

The note of Douglas, after his astonishment and joy to hear that I was still alive, and apparently uninjured, went on—

"Carysfort—poor fellow!—has been given over by the doctor. If Fanny becomes a widow I shall certainly propose to her after a fitting time. I love her dearly; yet if she refuses, or even marries another, I shall not die of a broken heart: a man can have that feeling but once in his life."

How was I ever to explain the absurd cause of my detention without exposing myself to the ridicule of the troops, of all Europeans, and to the astonishment and grief of Clarice?

What if some chattering Hottentot prisoner—and such were taken daily—told the real story, That I was to be, or was already, the son-in-law of the great rebel Caffre Sandilli?

"Are you a Caffre?" I asked, now surveying the tawny girl with some interest, for her skin was not much darker than that of some Italian girls, and her hair was long and silky.

"My mother was a Griqua."

"And your father?"

"Sandilli the great chief," said she proudly.

"And you—you?" I gasped.

"Am Mariqua, the girl who is to marry you," she replied, with a waggery almost European, as she swept my face with her fan of ostrich feathers.

“ Good heavens !” I exclaimed, and I sprang to my feet in earnest now.

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

I SCARCELY know how to relate the strange events that must fill this chapter up, unless I drop some of the links in my chequered story.

My thoughts were with Clarice Haywood, who, although saved at last, was yet quite lost to me. If I was ever to escape and rejoin her, arms and a fleet horse were absolutely necessary ; and to procure these I must dissemble, and foil the savage in his own wily fashion.

It is a perilous doctrine that temptation of itself palliates an offence, and yet there is much to consider on this point in all temptations and offences.

The girl thrust upon me by the Caffre chief was all and every way unlike the kind of woman I had, to my own disgust and horror, conjured up—a Caffre *belle*, with hooked nose and negro lips, her skin anointed with grease and sibilo, or iron ore, that sparkled in the sun, her woolly hair plaited into cords, and adorned by metal pendules, her attire an apron cut into thongs, a kaross of skin, and moccasins.

All unlike a creature of this kind, the girl whom I now saw was of mixed race—the daughter of a Griqua mother, whose tribe was descended from the old original Dutch colonists of South Africa on one side and the aborigines on the other, a tribe occupying the Orange River territory, which is larger than Great Britain.

She had the indescribable grace and ease of carriage peculiar to the women of Caffraria and the Fingoes ; but in this girl much of the Dutch blood predominated. Probably she was not more than sixteen years of age ; but in that tropical region she was considered a woman. Her figure was faultlessly beautiful, and a dress, which consisted of a low corset of scarlet stuff, and a double skirt of scarlet on green, barely reaching to below the knee, a kaross of black fur edged with scarlet, and a profusion of beads, displayed fully enough of



it. For one of a mixed race, her skin was wonderfully fair—fair, almost, as I have said, as that of an Italian girl of the dusky type.

Her finely-tapered arms were bare, and her delicate little feet were encased in embroidered shoes, that were too complete to be termed sandals, and joined her beaded moccasins.

There was much of European regularity in her face, which was singularly sweet in expression, though the lips were somewhat full and red ; her eyes were large and dark, soft as those of a gazelle, and full of lustre. Though the head-dress of the Griqua girls generally consists of two brightly-coloured silk handkerchiefs, her head was bare, and her tresses, which were long, rather silky, and of the deepest jet, were braided round in heavy coils, interwoven with bright metal beads.

Amid the beads at her neck was one formed from the root of a bush that grows by the Orange River, and which possesses a sweet and peculiar perfume.

Under her smooth, clear, olive skin I could see the hot southern blood mantling in her cheek, as I surveyed her with a mingled expression of face indeed.

My situation was a very embarrassing one, to say the least of it ; for my Griqua beauty was quite as much a "girl of the period" as her fairer sisters elsewhere, and, like them in taste, was very much disposed to lionize and idolize me as a distinguished foreigner—more than all, perhaps, from the northern mixture in her blood, as a pure European.

Something of a genuine blush blended with the tender smile that filled her face, when placing upon my arm two hands, which, though very brown, were small, and so beautifully formed that a sculptor would have doted on them, she said :

"You will not hate, but learn to love me in time, though the people of my father are at war with yours?"

"I shall never hate you, be assured of that," said I gently, while I placed the letters of Clarice and Douglas in the pocket of my now tattered blouse ; "but what will my people say if I return to them no more?"

"Does it matter to us what they say?"

"Us?" I queried, feeling myself as already adopted.

"Yes—to you and to me; besides, as the witch doctors have predicted, my father is a great chief, and he will drive all your wicked people from the land of the Koussie."

I shook my head, and almost smiled.

"And you have forsaken them to come and live with us?"

"I have forsaken them to come and dwell with you," said I, gallantly, making almost a wry face nevertheless, while she took my hand between her own and covered it with kisses.

The entire situation was fast becoming bewildering—awkward to the last degree. I felt myself an "engaged man," here as well as elsewhere; but here in spite of my teeth!

After a pause she resumed:

"How many gods have you? As the Umlanjeni will tell you, we have but the sun and the wind to worship."

"We have but one."

"So I have heard the Orange River missionaries say."

"You have heard them preach?"

"Yes; in the language of the Griquas: and you will marry me in their faith?"

"This is too much," I exclaimed, impatiently, and turned away, feeling for a time thoroughly annoyed, for the daughter seemed to be even "longer headed" than the father.

"Do not be offended with me," said she, caressing my neck; "the poor Griqua girl does so love and worship her white lord."

"Love me, do you say? Why, you have only known me five minutes—if you understand what five minutes are."

"I have watched by your bed since the sun rose above the mountains; and while watching thus I have learned—"

"What?"

"To love you."

"Impossible! You can't know what love is."

Her large eyes filled with a strange light, and she said half petulantly:

"I am not used to be contradicted ; and I said that I love you."

"Why?"

"Because you looked pale, and weary, and sad ; you sighed often in your sleep ; you dreamt."

"How do you know that?"

"Because you uttered a word, or a name ; I know not which."

"Clarice?"

"Yes, that was the sound. You murmured it many times. Then your lips quivered, and a tear left your eye—a tear which I kissed away."

"You?"

"Yes ; but so softly, so gently, that you never felt me nor awoke."

"By Jove !" thought I, "all this is becoming too much of a good thing."

"I shall often watch you so," said she, with a soft smile.

"When?"

"When we are married," was the cool reply.

"If I am to marry you, Mariqua, it must be in the fashion of your own tribe—as a Caffre, if I am to become one."

"But I am a Griqua," said she, coldly, and half turning her olive-tinted shoulder to me.

The girl was pouting, and very prettily too.

"Your husband should have a horse—a fleet horse—and such arms as become a man, a warrior," said I, reverting to my ever-present thought and desire.

"He shall have both, and everything becoming the Inkosi—the husband of Sandilli's daughter."

"The husband of Mariqua," said I insinuatingly.

"The husband, lord, and lover of the Griqua girl," she added, patting my cheeks with her hands, and placing her pretty mouth in very close proximity to mine ; but I was not prepared to bestow even upon her the caresses which I deemed the property of my absent Clarice, so I drew back.

"Heavens !" thought I, while gazing on her as she clung to

me in a manner that, if bewildering, was, to say the least of it, not unpleasant ; " is it possible that a being so innocent and artless is really a barbarian—a pagan—a Caffre, ignorant of the death she must die, and when dead, after the fashion of her people, no other grave than the maws of the vultures and jackals ?"

For a moment I thought I would endeavour to teach her, and train her mind ; but, sunk in densest darkness as she was, the task seemed a vain one.

" But the horse and arms, a musket and hatchet, Mariqua ?" said I, toying a little with her, in the hope that, before matters proceeded too far, I might obtain from her, or through her influence, what I required, and then " be off without beat of drum."

" You shall have all—the fleet horse of Pitoi, the son of Vonga, a musket, and a sharp hatchet too."

" But when—when ?" I asked impatiently.

" When we are married," said she, coyly and prettily, as she dropped her head on my shoulder.

" Wah—wah—wah !" said approvingly a voice with which I was now unpleasantly familiar, and Sandilli, with his black kaross and crane's feathers, a dagha pipe in one hand and a bundle of bloodstained assegais in the other, stood before me, a most unpromising-looking father-in-law, who had been regarding the scene with approbation, and with the air of one who would have no trifling with his daughter's " young affections."

The grin on his sardonic visage, the fierce hook of his nose, the cicatrised ornamentation of his skin, the row of white teeth he showed, and the glistening of his fierce dark eyes, with the effect of the two crane's feathers, reminded me somehow of Mephistopheles in the opera of *Faust*.

His sudden appearance—his evident satisfaction at the rapid progress of matters—his entire bearing, which seemed to say, " I have fulfilled my part of our contract, and now look for the fulfilment of yours," greatly alarmed and exasperated me.

The sudden and absurd love of the girl I might soothe or tolerate ; but there would be no baffling old Sandilli.

Proud of having a white lover, the girl was as determined to keep possession of me as he was. So from her I could have but small hope of assistance, unless I played my part well, like that of the " gay young knight who loved and rode away."

Then I was not without fears of her vengeance if I treated her with indifference or neglect, and especially that of her father, if she complained to him, for he would have thought no more of poking his assegai into me than into a pumpkin.

Though Mariqua was in many respects a mere savage, she was so gentle, trusting, and artless, that I was not without some remorse of conscience for playing the part I did ; yet it was forced upon me by circumstances beyond my control, and to have attempted any explanation to her, or temporizing with her father, would only have insured his wrath, which was prompt enough at all times, and very probably lead to my being broiled between red-hot stones, like the poor Dutch doctor.

I was full of supreme joy to feel assured of the safety of Clarice Haywood. I was burning with desire to achieve my liberty and rejoin her ; but only hoped to do either by falling apparently into the plans of my captors.

Every moment I perused and reperused her little note this longing grew stronger on me, and yet days and even weeks were stealing away. The words of it seemed to be the utterance of her own lips, and brought her sweet and highbred presence more vividly before me ; but ere long the soft pencilling became almost effaced and the fragment of paper frayed, yet I treasured it with all a lover's tenderness.

I obtained some days' delay by feigning an illness ; but this was done in vain. The witch-doctors were summoned from all quarters—those odious, cruel, and cunning Umlanjeni, at the thought of whom my blood ran cold—and, dreading a consultation with them, I consented to do anything Sandilli required of me, and so a great gathering of savages was con-

vened in a Gulu valley on a lovely evening in August, and the Wolf's den—the home-farm of Sandilli—became a scene of noisy whooping, yelling, and rejoicing, amid which I felt that I cut a perilous and absurd figure that filled my heart with anger and mortification.

The ceremony was simple enough, and consisted chiefly in the tying of a piece of the dried chitterling from some wild animal round the slender throat of the girl.

I was attired in a headdress of fur, like one of those which our troops found in such numbers in the royal Gaika kraal on the Amatolas, a kaross of tiger skin—like the crane's feathers, a badge of chieftainship—was placed upon my shoulders, and an assegai was put in my hand. I grasped it with stern joy. It seemed to be my first instalment, perhaps, of liberty—my guide to Clarice Haywood.

Around us the odious Umlanjeni performed many strange and satanic-like capers and incantations, and all the men present, to the number of thousands—wretches who would with joy have slain me, had such been the behest of their leaders—whooped and danced like fiends, striking their shields of hide and brandishing their assegais to a wild chorus, in obedience to Sandilli, and making a horrible medley of sound.

There was a feast, at which all kinds of animals, wild and tame, were devoured with great relish, and plenty of Cape wine and Dutch beer, plundered from lonely kraals and open villages, was drunk from vessels made of the shells of ostrich eggs and land tortoises.

The atmosphere was sickeningly redolent of the fumes from thousands of dagha pipes full of damp hempseed.

The scene around me was utterly bewildering. The bad wine, of which I had partaken rather freely, to drown care and desperation, together with the intoxicating effect of the dagha pipes, made me feel as one in a dream, and I could scarcely reply to Sandilli when, after the abominable hubbub was over, he proposed to depart to his camp, which was situated I knew not where, as he and all about me took especial care to keep me entirely in the dark as to the movements of the Caffres and of our troops.

"I shall expect my dear son—the husband of Mariqua—to begin soon the duties of a gallant Caffre chief," said he, with a strange leer in his eye.

"In what way ?" I asked rather sulkily.

"By leading my people against the white men—those accursed tortoises in particular—and by teaching us their artin war."

"Agreed ; but I must have a horse and arms."

Sandilli eyed me keenly and doubtfully.

"In time you shall have both," he said, after a pause.

"So am I always told ; but when ?"

"When I return to take you with me to the field."

"What if I should refuse ?"

His eyes shot fire, and the grasp of his mahogany-like hand tightened on his assegai ; but he said quietly—

"My son will know better than to do that."

"If I fight, Sandilli, it shall be in the van," said I, feeling that I was not improving matters at present, and that my best chance at escape—if not shot down by our own people—would be in getting as far to the front as possible.

"Wah, wah, wah !" said he approvingly.

"And if I fall—"

"Who, then, will love poor Mariqua ?" said the girl, as she wound her soft brown arms affectionately round me.

I shivered as she spoke, for I felt all the dark falsehood of my present position.

At last the uproarious and savage sounds died away, the Caffres departed, all save twenty, who were posted in and about the kraal as a guard, under Vonga, the father of the slain Pitoi, an old and savage chief ; and after a time we were left alone—Mariqua and I.

And now came the most troublesome part of the task my evil fate had assigned me—to play the part of the lover in earnest, when I was yearning only to escape and be at liberty in the wild forest or on the distant mountains, open and free—to be with one I might never see again.

Under the effects of all I had undergone I felt my brain

reeling ; yet a cool and delicious breeze laden with the rich perfume of the orange and citron groves without came through the half-opened windows of the room, which was the best in the kraal, and had actually Venetian blinds. The walls were covered with French paper representing Hindoo girls, brilliantly attired, Bayadères, and girls dancing ; and to my disordered vision the room became at times as if peopled by phantoms.

Seated a little way apart from me, Mariqua was eyeing me by the light of an oil lamp, that streamed and spluttered in the currents of the night wind.

"You are thinking more of a horse and arms than of me !" said she, with tender reproach.

"Why do you think so ?" I asked, feeling the necessity for saying something.

"Because I see it in your face. Your spirit is elsewhere."

"I must have a very tell-tale face, Mariqua."

"Oh, why is this ? Would you really leave me ?"

I made no reply, for I was not unwilling that she should think so.

"Oh, do not leave your poor Griqua girl ! She will destroy herself if you do. I am yours—yours. Do with me as you please, even to taking my life ; but do not leave me."

And now she clung to me wildly and passionately.

Tears choked her utterance. She had torn off and cast aside, as if weary and petulant, the brilliant flowers and ornaments with which the women of the tribe had decorated her ; and her long dark hair, which looked almost blue when the lamplight struck it, fell in dishevelled masses over her polished but olive-tinted neck and shoulders. The poor girl looked very beautiful, in her grief and love, and I must own that for a time she fairly vanquished me, though never for a moment shaking the yearning desire to be gone—to place miles between herself and me.

My position was full of growing danger. In one of her nature, the love and grief of Mariqua might readily and easily turn to rage and hate.



I drained a cup of wine which she gave me, and then the room seemed to swim round me, the wall to vibrate, and all the dancers, Hindoos, Bayadères, Almé, and Bacchantes to whirl in mazes about us.

"Promise that you will never leave me, nor seek to return to your own people, or if you do that you will take me with you." Strange entreaties, thought I, for a girl to make on what she deemed to be her wedding day. "Tell me that you will love me—love me ever and always. But you are silent; you sigh and look away," she continued, after a pause, while her eyes began to glow, and drawing back, with her hands on my shoulders, she seemed to look into my very soul.

"Mariqua, why ask all this of me—just now especially?" I murmured, not very well knowing what to say, while seating her beside me on the couch, I endeavoured to calm her, and to soothe her fears for the time.

"I ask you a question, and you reply by asking another," she said in a low sad voice, as she rested her head on my shoulder, and I was left thus, with the graceful Griqua girl, my savage bride, clinging to me, imploring me not to leave her, beseeching me never to leave her, in her soft and most musical, yet at times deep and guttural language, for that she loved me, and me only.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHILE I was a prisoner, and in ignorance of all that passed beyond the sequestered mountain kraal in which the artful Sandilli kept me, neither his people nor our troops had been idle. John Bull's money was not being spent in vain.

A standing camp had been formed by the general at a place named Reit Fontein, from whence patrols and escorts went out daily. Some of these were under Douglas, Bonteine, Graves, and other special friends, who were not without hope of finding or succouring me; while light infantry drill, cooking indifferent rations, and patching tattered uniforms, occupied the spare hours of those who remained behind.

To one of those patrol parties, composed of the Fingo

Levy, were Clarice Haywood and her sister delivered by an escort of Fingo prisoners, liberated for that purpose by Sandilli ; and the unexpected arrival of the ladies at the standing camp caused a very general feeling of rejoicing among the troops ; but the mystery attending my residence or detention was increased by the hand I had in procuring their liberty, and caused a constant speculation among the 74th, in whose memory the fate of their bandmaster, Hartung, and of several others, who had unhappily fallen alive into the hands of the Caffres, was yet fresh.

The discovery of the charred remains of the unfortunate Dr. Bruine Kasteel, by a patrol party under Sergeant Robert Burns, of the 74th, put an end to all conjecture for a time, as they were supposed to be mine, for my forage cap was found on the ground close by ; and Douglas, with great delicacy and tact, continued, for a time at least, to keep all knowledge of this terrible suspicion from Clarice and her sister, who, attended by a party of armed volunteers, boors, and Fingoes, set out for the village where Major Carysfort was still hovering between life and death.

General Somerset soon gave old Sandilli plenty of work, and hence I was spared the infliction of his presence. With a detachment of the 74th Highlanders, and another of the Cape Corps, Somerset scoured all the district of Hell Port and the Zum Bergen Mountains, which lie between the province now bearing his own name, and that of Uitenhagen ; and on the 30th August, about the very time Sandilli left me in the Gulu Valley, he attacked the Caffres on the bank of the New Year River, where they had a strong position in a difficult and rugged kloof, and then he dispersed them with great slaughter, capturing one hundred and sixty horses and cattle.

Two days afterwards, the 2nd, or Queen's Regiment, which had just arrived in the colony, and been marched to the front, had a smart brush with his people elsewhere, and routed them with considerable loss ; but in the wild bush, near the Fish River, a party of the 2nd was completely cut off. The captain fell mortally wounded, while fifty-seven of his men were killed or maimed.

The 74th attacked Macomo on the heights of Kromme.

Mounted on a beautiful white charger, at the head of three hundred picked Caffre horsemen, who seemed as a body guard to accompany him everywhere, this daring chief made himself conspicuous over all the field, and with his own hand dismounted Colonel Fordyce, of the Highlanders, by shooting his horse under him ; but the heights were carried at the point of the bayonet, after a terrible hand-to-hand conflict, in which the supple and well-greased Caffre had, in too many instances, an advantage over the belted and heavily-accounted soldier of the line. "Our gallant fellows fought most bravely," wrote an officer. "One man, with an assegai deeply buried between his shoulders, singled out its owner, and shot him dead, while the weapon was nearly protruding through his chest. One grenadier killed four Caffres with his own hand."

The storming of the Water Kloof by five or six battalions of the line caused a considerable panic among the Caffre leaders, and by order of Sandilli I was conveyed, with Mariqua, far away from the Gulu Valley, to a place many miles—some two hundred or so—northward—a change of locality that added to my anxiety for the future, as it greatly increased the difficulty of escape.

Vonga and his twenty horsemen took possession of the only house that survived in what was once a peaceful and flourishing Moravian missionary station, the name of which I never learned. The others had evidently been but recently destroyed by fire, after being, no doubt, completely pillaged, and the flights of vultures hovering over particular places in an adjacent cane-brake seemed to indicate that in those spots lay the bodies of the dead unburied.

In the upper story he placed Mariqua and myself. The lower he appropriated to his men and their horses. I had not yet procured the long-coveted arms, and even the assegai had been taken from me by Vonga ; but I had, by a lucky chance, become proprietor of a small hatchet, and a package containing forty rounds of rifle ammunition, with percussion caps, and these I secreted under an old Dutch cabinet which stood in a corner of my sleeping room.

I examined this new locality with a keen eye. Northward and eastward of the ruined station rose grand and towering cliffs of basaltic rock, from whence sloped banks of the greenest and smoothest grass.

Southward and westward—the way I must pursue if ever I escaped—stretched a vast plain, dotted by groves of trees. The country for many miles was unpleasantly open for a fugitive! but I soon became aware that, deeming me sufficiently secure by the great distance to which they had conveyed me, Vonga and his men relaxed much of their vigilance, and there seldom passed a night on which I could not have escaped with ease, but for want of a horse and arms.

Without the latter, wherewith to feed myself, and defend me against man and beast, in such a country I was helpless as a child.

On the morning after that wild orgie which I have striven to describe in the last chapter, I felt only mortification and compunction for the part I had been compelled to play, and the way I had deceived Mariqua.

I would have fled from her, and from myself; but I was a prisoner in the hands of the remorseless Vonga, and had to remain with her and my remorse, like Ixion on his wheel.

“Oh, Clarice—Clarice Haywood!” I exclaimed, and struck my hands together in passionate grief.

By the endearments I had been obliged to lavish on her, I had deluded the poor Griqua maid into trusting as well as loving me. Was I the pure and earnest lover the high-bred English girl thought me—the *preux chevalier* that Douglas and Fanny deemed me?

It seemed to me that I was only protracting my life at the expense of my honour, and so my mental misery increased as the weeks of October stole wearily away.

In the end, however, I began to have a brotherly feeling for my gentle savage—never a warmer one; yet she filled me with an undefinable fear, for I knew that if once abandoned, in her wild despair she would kill herself or me, or both, if she had an opportunity. I grew ennuyed and sick of her

hourly presence, though she was thankful if I permitted her to kiss even my hand, which she used to do with a bearing of respect and love that mingled gracefully with pride.

In my moments of sadness and reflection, the poor girl would often ask me, tenderly and lovingly, in her strange, soft language—"Of what are you thinking?"

"Why do you ask?"

"You are so very sad and silent—well, of what?"

"Of you," I would reply, and then feel shame for the flattering falsehood that brought a flush of joy to her olive cheek, and a strange light in her soft and beautiful eyes.

I was not, however such a bad fellow as I then believed myself to be. Times there were when I thought of speaking to her of religion—of endeavouring to teach her something of the Trinity, and of the God of the Christians; but how was I to plunge into the mystery of theological metaphysics? and how bring before an ignorant and unlettered girl such holy puzzles as those which bewilder and set by the ears the most learned in the land?

I shrunk from the task. Besides, was it not better to leave her in ignorance than by enlightening her seek to confound and disgrace myself?

Great terror I had of the return of Sandilli. I knew the odious and perilous tasks he would expect me to perform, and so felt a growing anxiety for a speedy departure. Thus I panted with an emotion of clamorous alarm in my heart to be gone.

After the arrival of the 12th, or East Suffolk Regiment, from the Mauritius, and the victorious affair of the Water Kloof—though I knew nothing of it—mounted Caffres arrived frequently with messages from Sandilli to Vonga. Great events were evidently on the *tapis*, and the ferocious old savage who had me in custody now viewed me with such peculiar aversion and malignity, that I felt certain our arms were proving successful, and knew that, but for the protection of Sandilli and the presence of Mariqua, he would soon have made short work with me.

One morning—oh, I shall never, never forget it!—about daybreak, a deserter from the Cape Mounted Rifle Regiment—Jan Cupido, one of the same rascals who assisted Mark Sharkeigh in the abduction of Clarice and her sister—arrived at the missionary station with a message for Vonga. Whence he had come, or whether about me, I know not; but his message, or tidings, whatever they were, seemed to excite the greatest interest among my Caffre gaolers.

His horse he had left at the gate, accoutred and bridled, with his double-barrelled regimental rifle hanging in its usual place by a bucket and sling, to the right side of the saddle. Here was a golden opportunity, and not a moment to be lost.

I looked at Mariqua; she was sound asleep on a couch of skins. Her olive cheek was resting on her tapered olive arm—her long lashes seemed sealed over her eyes. Poor thing! she looked very innocent, with a pet fawn antelope nestling beside her. Dark though she was, Mariqua was indeed beautiful, and some there are who might have loved her. I gave her a farewell glance; for an instant an emotion of compunction came over me. The next saw me secure my ammunition and the hatchet, with which I was resolved to cleave to the teeth the first Caffre who discovered or opposed me.

Opening the window softly, I slipped outside, and dropped lightly to the ground—a fall of only seven feet or so. A gap in the hedge of prickly pears and geraniums, forming the compound of the house, favoured my further exit, and while I panted rather than breathed, I crept round to where the horse stood pawing the earth, impatient of a feed.

My blood seemed to boil and my veins to tingle, so great was my excitement as I seized the double bridle, sprang upon his back, and though without spurs, urged the well-trained animal to a furious gallop, I knew not, and cared not in what direction, so that I placed a comfortable distance—some odds at least—between myself and the men of old Vonga.

But I had scarcely ridden two hundred yards before I heard a wild and wailing cry. It was the voice of Mariqua, and a pang shot through my heart as I recalled how often she had

threatened to destroy herself if she was ever abandoned by me ; but her voice—if she raised it again—was drowned in the fiend-like yells of others, as the men of Vonga rushed like furies to their arms and horses.

At last I was armed, mounted, at liberty, and free to make a struggle man to man for the life that heaven had given me.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

THE memory of Bruine Kasteel's fate, and a terror of being subjected to something similar, added wings to my flight, and keenness to my despair at the thought of being retaken. Compunction for leaving my mock wife I had now none. I rode on, on, blindly on, though the Cape Rifle horse was far from fresh ; but to lighten the weight he carried, I cut off and threw away the valise of his late proprietor, taking care to drop it into a pool of water, lest, if found, it might serve to indicate my track.

This was perhaps a useless precaution, as the country was so open that for a time I was distinctly visible to those who were now leaving the Moravian station in hot haste, with horse, and spear, and musket, to pursue me.

I rode on blindly, longing for shelter and the friendly obscurity of night ; but the time as yet was only sunrise, and I had a long and too probably a perilous day before me.

I had the start of my pursuers by a few miles, but their horses were fresh from the stall, while mine was weary, and I knew that the Caffres would follow any track or trail I left with deadly instinct and unwearying tenacity.

I reached the cover of a thick grove of trees—chestnuts and mimosas—and made the horse pursue for more than a mile the bed of a runnel that traversed the road, so that all trace of his hoofs—my trail—should be broken off. Unbitting him then, I knee-haltered him, relaxed the saddle-girth, and slinging the rifle over my shoulder, clambered into a thick tree at some distance, there to conceal myself in case of the thicket being, as I expected, surrounded and searched. In that case, I had resolved to permit the horse to be taken without resistance,

and would be only too happy if I escaped undiscovered on my perch.

High up among the branches I should be quite unseen, and from thence could see around me and below. The life I had led for some years past as a trader with the Caffres, and a complete knowledge of their character, made me leave no precaution untried to baffle them.

On examining the rifle, both barrels proved to be loaded and capped ; thus, I had two shots more than my forty rounds, which I now took from their paper wrappers and prepared for service. They were luckily Government ammunition, and suited exactly the regimental rifle of the sable Jan Cupido.

How wildly beat my heart as I sat perched up there among the green foliage and yellow flowers of a great mimosa, listening intently to every sound, and every moment expecting to see the ferocious Caffres—led by old Vonga, hissing through their white teeth, and yelling like unchained demons—come crashing among the trees at full speed, with musket and assegai ; and I could imagine the whoop of triumph and exultation with which they would greet the discovery of my haltered horse, and the close investigation of the vicinity that would at once be instituted.

But all remained still, most solemnly still. I heard only the wild beating of my heart and the chattering of an occasional monkey, who doubtless wondered at my adoption of his habits, and invasion of his sylvan retreat.

As the time passed on, and noon drew nigh, I was pleased to find, by the direction in which the shadows fell, that I had, by a fortunate chance, in the first energy of flight, taken the proper direction towards the south-west. To aid my lonely steps, I had now no pocket compass, as in the days when I had my waggon and team to inspann for the road and outspann when we halted.

I passed the entire day without food. I felt only thirst, for the excitement and anxiety I endured were great. The runnel gurgled sweetly and pleasantly below the tree in which I sat—cool it looked, and most inviting, as its current glided smoothly



over the brown pebbles, and under the broad green leaves the yellow gourds, the scarlet flowers, and long, reedy grass that bordered it ; but I dared not yet descend to quench my thirst.

A zebra came to drink—a large and beautifully streaked one—and I envied the long, deep draught the animal took, till suddenly his eye caught sight of my saddled horse that was grazing near, and then he fled from the spot.

In an adjacent tree I could see that a colony of bees had lodged themselves, and I longed for some of their spoil—the honey—but had no means of smoking them out. With some dry grass I could soon have done so ; but to fire it would have cost me a ball cartridge, and lack of that cartridge in some future contingency might cost me my life.

Evening drew on—the evening of an interminable day as it seemed to me ; but I endured all with patience and hope, trusting that this was but the fortunate beginning of a happy end ; and thinking over the two lines from “ Macbeth ” with which I had often consoled myself in those perilous times, and have already quoted :—

“ Come what—come may,  
Time and the hour run through the roughest day ! ”

So the lagging hours passed on, the shadows grew deeper in the leafy grove, and I ventured to leave my lofty perch at last.

While laving my face and head in the runnel I drank as the thirsty alone can drink. I then rubbed down the horse with tufts of dry karoo grass ; the animal was fresh now after a long day of rest. I looked carefully to his trappings—to bridle, girths, and stirrup-leathers ; slung my rifle to the saddle, and mounting, set forth, guided only by the last amber flush of day that lingered in the west beyond the undulating range of hills, which at the end of the plain rose opaquely against the light, like the dark blue waves of a petrified sea.

All night I rode towards those hills, and saw them rising in magnitude before me. Over the wild karoo I traversed herds of antelopes were scouring ; once or twice a pair of

giant ostriches, a flock of bustards, and a covey of partridges passed me, but nothing hostile was visible under the clear bright stars of the Southern Cross, and my ear could detect no sound of hoofs, though I sometimes dismounted, and placed my face close to the ground to listen.

I rode hopefully on, and as yet without any desire for food or sleep, and without much sensation of weariness; but I knew that food and slumber, too, would become pressing necessities on the morrow, and when and how could I provide a meal without using my rifle, and thereby summoning I knew not what enemy from the nearest thicket or kloof, even in the wilderness?

As pale daybreak began to steal in, and cast my shadow before me, the green waste was seen to be spangled with flowers, and studded here and there by the lovely acacia, the gaudy yellow blossoms of which are the favourite of the giraffe. They loaded the air with perfume.

The sun was rising when I found myself entering a narrow ravine that seemed to form the beginning of a pass through the mountains. There was also the appearance of a kind of pathway, or track, which had long been neglected, for creepers had overgrown it.

As day brightened I became anxious for a shelter and place wherein I might sleep for a few hours in safety from Caffres, and those wild animals with which the country abounds. One side of the kloof, or ravine, was covered densely by forest trees, on the other rose great masses of gray basaltic rock, in which I perceived several fissures; so my plans were formed at once.

In the forest I unbitted and knee-haltered my horse as before, concealing the saddle in a tree. Then, rifle in hand, I proceeded to ascend the cliffs in search of a secure place for shelter, and in the hope of finding some wild birds' eggs.

Over detached blocks, which had fallen in masses from the summits above, I clambered on my hands and knees, and saw that what had appeared from a distance to be a fissure was a regular cavern, having a narrow entrance, but widening within.

A pang of alarm came into my breast, and instinctively I cocked both locks of my rifle, on perceiving the face of the cliff about the entrance was all starred and scored by bullets, thus indicating that an attack and defence of some recent inmates had taken place.

I shouted and then concealed myself, expecting instantly to see the woolly head and gleaming eyes of an armed Caffre, or the thick curly pate of some hunted boor or bushranger appear; but, save the echoes of my voice, no sound responded. Encouraged by this I resumed the ascent, and ere long found myself in a very curious and well-concealed retreat, below the brow of a gloomy and impending cliff, from the verge of which there hung thousands of baboon-ropes and brilliant trailers, forming a green and natural fringe.

The smooth faces of the rocks within the cavern were covered with Bushman paintings or frescoes, not unlike those which are found on Egyptian tombs; in the most brilliant colours—red, blue, black, and white—were representations of the chase. Men on horseback and on foot, armed with bows, war-clubs, and assegais, were seen in pursuit of uncouth figures that were meant for the gemsbok, the koodoo, and the elephant, with many other designs which the wild Bushmen are said to have worshipped of old.

These I merely glanced at casually, being more excited and interested by traces of more recent inhabitants, in the shape of some embers, scarcely cold, a cooking-place of stones, some fruit, vegetables, and Caffre corn that lay near, and three brace of fine plump partridges, recently shot. Besides, there was a regularly-formed bed of dry leaves in a corner.

Whoever they were, the proprietors of these affairs were absent at present; but they might return at any moment, and much too soon for my purpose.

If fugitive Europeans, they might materially assist me in my ultimate escape. If hostile Caffres or Amaponda thieves my fate might soon be sealed if they found me in their den. But the mode in which the partridges were plucked and hung

upon a cleft stick, and the manner in which the vegetables had also been prepared, made me almost certain that the place had been occupied very recently by Europeans; so I resolved to watch and wait.

I clambered into a dry and cosy nook, a little way farther up the rocks, where some bushes of the scarlet and pink-leaved geranium, which grew in every cleft and crevice, completely concealed me, with my rifle carefully capped and cocked by my side, and the sharp little hatchet close at hand. I found a shelf of rock that formed a pillow, and then, worn out by all I had undergone—by want of food and rest—I sank into a profound slumber.

Yet it was not so profound but that I had dreams of Clarice Haywood, in her pure white beauty, of her voice so tender and love-laden, of Walcot Tower and the Cheviot Hills, and of old Haddonrig in the sweet season of summer, when the drowsy hum of flies and bees came, with fragrance of the garden flowers, through every open window.

When I awoke all was dark; the moon, red and fiery, yet on the wane, seemed to linger above the black peak of a mountain, while the clouds, like torn veils of crape, were swept past her face by the gusty wind, imparting a weird aspect to the scenery, nearly all of which was sunk in sombre obscurity.

Far down below, the kloof and wood in which I had left my horse were buried in utter blackness. For a moment I could scarcely remember where I was or how I came to be there.

Was it the fragment of some distempered dream that out of all this there seemed to come before me the soft dark face and black upbraiding eyes of the Griqua girl from whom I was flying?

“But can I sacrifice my liberty for her?” thought I. “Bah! the little savage will soon become consoled.”

Yet the thoughts of Mariqua were not to be so easily thrust aside.

I now heard the sound of voices near me. What was the

language spoken I could not determine; but the red glow of a fire now shone from the mouth of the cavern I had lately explored. Its recent tenants had returned, and others now were there.

Judging by the position of the stars and the sinking moon, midnight was past, and day-break could not be far off, and now was the time to satisfy myself as to who these people were—if friends, to join them; if foes, to creep down to the thicket in the kloof, mount, and be off westward with all speed.

I carried the hatchet in my teeth, and, rifle in hand, crept out of my rocky alcove. Drawing near the mouth of the cavern I peeped in.

The odour of the broiling partridges came pleasantly towards me from a fire of wood, the red flames of which lit up, with quaint grotesquerie, the garish Bushman frescoes on the walls of rock, so that the figures seemed to start forth to the eye, to move and waver like a shaken tapestry.

Near the fire were seated two men, dressed in the usual colonial fashion, with round jackets, yellow "cracker" trousers and mocassins of fur, with Fingo hats and feathers.

Both were armed with gun and knife. One, a Hottentot, was busily superintending the cooking; the other, a white man of great size and personal strength, apparently, reclined on the bed of leaves.

He groaned heavily at times, as if in pain. He seemed pale and weary, and his right leg, which was bound up by strips of raw hide, was evidently wounded, for it appeared powerless, broken, and covered with blood.

I entered the cavern, rifle in hand. The sufferer, with the air and eye of one who cared little now whether he met friend or foe, looked up from his bed of leaves, and I found myself face to face—with whom?

Mark Sharkeigh, *alias* Graaff, the Bushranger, the fugitive convict, the subtle and revengeful wretch who, in concert with an awful hypocrite, had defrauded me of my birthright, and consequently, as yet, of Clarice Haywood!

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

MARK SHARKEIGH he proved to be indeed, and his comrade was my quondam knecht and follower, Adrian Africander, the thief, deserter, and rebel. So I had suddenly lighted upon pleasant company.

On recognising me, Africander made a wild spring towards his rifle, which lay on the ground near the fire ; but I was too quick for him. Adroitly placing my foot on it, I thrust him back furiously, by charging him breast high with mine, and with all my force. He grew peagreen with terror, and reeled against the rocky wall of the cavern, exclaiming, in his Cape gibberish—

“Ya, ya, Almachtig ! Dat is he—my groote Baas Reichardt ! Shoot, shoot, Baas Mark, or, mi scapsils ! (*i.e.* my stars) he will make an end of us.”

“Was there ever such a confounded old duffer, to let himself be disarmed ; but I’ll settle his hash if I can,” cried Sharkeigh, writhing himself into a sitting position, and true to his first and natural impulses, attempting to cock his gun with the intention of shooting me.

But he fell back powerless, unable to lift or level it ; so I instantly snatched it from him, and then both men were before me, defenceless save their knives, which one was incapable of using, and the other was afraid to do so.

“Shoot, shoot !” cried Adrian Africander in growing confusion and dismay.

“Silence, you traitor and thief,” I exclaimed ; “as I have no jambok here I shall talk to you by and by ; but I must first confer with this greater villain.”

Then, with great deliberation, I smashed both their rifles, breaking each at the small part of the butt.

The wounded outlaw, from his bed of leaves, glared at me for a time like a veritable wild beast. His eyes were suffused with blood ; the hairs of his vast and untrimmed beard seemed to bristle with the nervous excitement, which led him fatuously to open and shut his huge and clumsy hands. Then he

clasped them and groaned deeply, for he felt that all was over with him now. He was frightfully pale, for he had evidently lost much blood, and had endured great agony.

I afterwards learned that, on escaping from his kraal on the night it was (for Clarice) so opportunely attacked by Sandilli, he had made his way with Adrian Africander to this Bushman's cavern or temple.

On the preceding evening this retreat had been discovered and attacked by Vonga's people when in pursuit of me, and the fight had ensued to fill up their time. The worthy pair had escaped to the forest in the kloof; they had been fired at there, and Mark was wounded—had his right thighbone "smashed to pieces in the skrimmage," as he said.

And now it would seem that he had crawled back here but to die; for his blood was in such a state of fever and ferment by the excesses of his past life that mortification was already setting in.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, through his clenched teeth, as he surveyed me with an indescribable glance. "So, as we say in the bush, 'you have got the right snake by the tail at last.'"

"It would seem so," said I, while leaning on my rifle, and surveying with wonder and disgust the now crippled wretch on whom Death had put his icy fingers. "You are a snake, a serpent, indeed."

"We have met before, Captain Haddon," said he, "and now we meet for the last time. I have not forgotten, though I now forgive, the precious tap on the head you gave me in that scuffle with old Bagshot in Teviotdale. My first idea—it's nature, I suppose—was to pot you; but my second is to die without another crime."

"That is well," said I. "You will, I hope, bring your terrible life to a decent close."

"My life has indeed been terrible," said he bitterly, and in a trembling voice; "but who thrust that life upon me, or rather who thrust me upon the bad career with which you taunt me?"

"Your own evil propensities."

"Not so, but your uncle, old Hab, of Haddonrig, who again and again had me convicted and locked up among felons and thieves as a poacher, till I grew in time to be a thief and a felon myself. Who put me in the Castle of Jedburgh, even as a boy—a halfling bairn—for stealing pheasant eggs for my sick mother, and for picking sticks out of his park fence for her little fire in winter? Who, but old Hab of Haddonrig! This was but the result of your cursed game law—a law made by the rich for the temptation and oppression of the poor. Then I grew to be a man, and I shot everything that came in my way, and made many a clean sweep of the preserves, as you know. Next I was on the turf, as you know, too, Master Dick," continued the miserable creature, becoming more colloquial as his voice grew weaker, while he reclined against the side of the cavern with half-closed eyes. "Yes, on the turf for a while, and soon got the name of a blackleg, though I was on pretty equal terms with the best in the land, for the turf of the race-course, like the turf of the cold kirkyard, levels all distinctions. Many a tip I took from those who lost, and many more from those who won, till I grew weary of being a regular rascal, and betaking me to my gun again, became once more an honest poacher."

"Honest!"

"Yes, honest, Dick Haddon, for the birds of the air and earth belong to no man, howsomever old Haddonrig may have thought."

His lips seemed to be baked with fever, so I handed him an ostrich egg filled with water from a spring that gurgled down the rocks, and he gave me a glance expressive of surprise, and also of as much gratitude as his ferocious visage could assume.

"I little thought, even in sore extremity like this, to get even a drop of water from your hand, Dick Haddon. I tried to do you wrong many times when I came upon your trail in the bush; but that is all past and gone now—past and gone." He moaned heavily and then added: "I thank God now that the girls got off free, as I have heard—old Toby of Walcot's daughters, I mean. Yes, I am indeed thankful for that, now that I find myself lying here!"



There was a pause ; after which I said :

"You had your chances at home in the old country—chances like other men—and might have become respectable, had you lived industriously and quietly."

"Respectable and industrious ! Ah, ah ! What chance of being either one or t'other has a returned transport, a ticket-of-leave man, whom every prowling detective or rural policeman, whose sweetheart mayhap you fancy, may talk about you, and say to your employer, 'Look out, don't trust him?' So a fellow such as I had never the ghost of a chance for doing good, Captain Haddon. Had I risen to be an elder in the kirk, the taint would stick to me, and the taunt be given. So I was best off where the waves and winds cast me, here in the wild bush, with all men's hands against me, and mine against all men."

"And in this terrible spirit you could actually assassinate your harmless countrymen—private soldiers who never injured you—poor fellows in our native tartan, too !"

"What does it matter that they were so?" he growled. "Those same countrymen had hunted me and others like wild beasts from bush to rock, and from rock to tree, for many months, and thus I only shot those who would have shot me. It was my life against their lives, that was all ! And yet, and yet—" His voice died away, and his nether lip quivered convulsively, and in a changed voice he said : "My mother lies in Kelso kirkyard, by the old abbey wall, far, far away, where I shall never lie. Oh, happy, happy dead !"

"You wrong yourself, poor wretch," said I. "The lees of some good are in you yet."

"Do you think so, Master Dick ? Perhaps the devil is never so black as he is painted, though Heaven knows I have been bad enough and black enough in my time ; but law made me so."

"No doubt it was very impertinent of the law to punish your peccadilloes."

"Don't sneer at a dying man, Captain Haddon, a rascal

though he be. Some day—to-morrow, to-night, perhaps—if Sandilli or Vonga get upon our trail, you may lie, as I now lie, face to face with Heaven. Yes," he added, in a low solemn, and wailing voice, choked with sobs, "face to face with Heaven."

He turned his haggard eyes as he spoke to the bright evening sky.

I threw some dry branches on the fire, and drawing forth a brace of the broiled partridges, rent them asunder, and offered a piece to Sharkeigh, but he turned from it as if with loathing. I was starving for lack of food, feeling faint, in fact, and so appeased my own hunger ; but during this interval, or while I had been stooping over the sufferer, Adrian Africander would seem to have stolen out of the cavern unperceived by either of us.

"You know the trick that old Prue Grubb and I played you after Halbert Haddon's death?" said he, after a pause.

"Too well—but too well. It ruined me ; cost me my commission, and the loss of one who was dearer to me than a thousand commissions. It made me a wanderer on the face of the earth. Mark Sharkeigh, if ever one man revenged himself for a mere blow, dealt in a scuffle, you have had a terrible revenge on me !"

"I shall make amends ere it be too late."

"How?"

"By writing a full confession of the plot."

"And your share in it?"

"Yes, a signed confession."

"But without witnesses of trust, what will it avail me?"

"Heaven will witness it !" cried the miserable creature, with a strange burst of fervour. "My signature is in the books of Jedburgh Castle more than once. Let those who doubt it compare my signed confession with the documents there."

"But paper, pens, ink—we are without them. Surely your mind wanders?"

"It does not. There is an ammunition wrapper. Make me a pen with your knife, and I'll soon find suitable ink."

I smoothed out a piece of brown paper that lay near—cartridges had once been wrapped in it—and with my knife cut him a pen of a quill from a wild bird's pinion, for many lay strewn there.

With hands that trembled a little, he laid the paper upon the crown of his broad hat, which he placed before him as a desk, and deliberately dipping the pen into a black pool of his own blood, which lay in a crevice of the cavern floor, he proceeded to write out a brief but clear confession of the conspiracy which the Scottish courts of law had failed to clear up—the plot by which he and an artful hypocrite had defrauded me of my lawful inheritance, and brought about the fatal blight that fell upon Clarice and me, as I have already detailed in the earlier chapters of my story.

I watched him attentively as he wrote on, with long pauses at times, either to choose words, or because he was faint and weak.

At last he signed it with the last effort of a bold hand, and gave it to me. Legally it might, nay would certainly, be worthless ; yet it was a link in my history, and thanking him for it, I placed it where I carried the tattered letter of Clarice.

Now all the strength seemed to pass out of Mark Sharkeigh, and his head sank heavily against the wall of rock. I thought the man was gone. I felt his pulse, and it was beating still. I placed the shell of water to his lips ; he drank some, and reviving a little, looked hurriedly about him.

"Where is Africander?" he asked huskily.

"Gone—stolen away," said I, now missing the sable rascal for the first time, so fully had my thoughts been occupied.

"Gone where?" asked Sharkeigh, with some asperity of manner.

"I know not."

"But I know !" exclaimed the other, with new energy ; "it is to betray you."

"To whom ? Vonga ?" said I, starting.

"No ; oh, no."

"To whom, then ?"

"Some Amapondas and rebel Hottentots, who are encamped in the bush about three miles distant."

"Are you sure of this?"

"I have not a doubt of it. Adrian Africander is capable of anything."

"Yet no master could be kinder to a servant than I for years have been to him. The ungrateful dog!"

"So now begone, I implore you, Captain Haddon. You have been kind to me—have forgiven me, perhaps," said he, in a broken voice; "and I would not have you caught and butchered here, as these Caffre devils alone know how to torture. Away; you have not a moment to lose."

"And you?"

"Leave me to die in peace. Man can do nothing for me now—nothing; perhaps not even give me a grave."

Here was a dilemma for which I was by no means prepared. I was certainly not under such obligations to this man that I should watch by his deathbed at the risk of my own life. The latter I knew would be instantly sacrificed the moment Africander returned with this horde of Amaponda Caffres at his back. I resolved at once to quit the cavern, and at all events, while there was yet time, seek the shelter of the thicket in the kloof. After a space I might return, and before finally setting off to cross the mountains, pay a farewell visit to the dying sinner.

I said something of this to Sharkeigh, and he seemed deeply grateful to me. I then seized my rifle and hatchet, and quitted the Bushman's temple. The sufferer seemed then to be sinking into a kind of trance, for his eyes were closed, his head reclined against the hard rock, and he seemed neither to hear nor see my departure.

All that had passed seemed like a dream to me, as I went plunging down the rough rocky face of the slope, and reached unseen, as I hoped, the thicket where my horse had passed the night. The saddle, wet with dew, was soon girthed on, and I now thought that while all remained quiet in this locality it would be wiser in me to get out of it at once, as the wood would in all likelihood be searched for me.

I mounted and set forth, after a careful reconnaissance, but I had barely got into the open portion of the kloof when I saw behind me a mounted band, consisting of many horsemen.

They seemed about two miles distant, and by the sudden quickening of their speed and change of direction to be undoubtedly in pursuit of me.

#### CHAPTER XXXVII.

By his mode of riding, and the round white jacket which he wore, I knew one of those horsemen to be Adrian Africander.

In this new pressing danger I nearly forgot all about the poor, despairing sinner who lay dying in yonder cavern, incapable almost of fashioning a prayer with his pallid lips to that Maker before whom he was so soon to appear, for his fate might soon be sealed if any wild animal came that way and scented the blood of his wounded limb.

Galloping onward into the wooded kloof between the mountain slopes, I was not without hope of distancing these pursuers altogether, or, at least, of successfully eluding them, and getting by a *détour* in their rear amid the thin morning mist, which was now curling upward, white as snow in the golden sunshine, from every hollow place.

My horse was in tolerable order, but a good feed of corn would have given it more mettle than the grazing had done, and thus I soon became aware that I barely preserved the distance between myself and the Amaponda Caffres, who were alike fleetly and well mounted. Indeed, ere long, by the sounds that the wind brought towards me, I became painfully conscious that they were gaining on me, and that unless I found concealment or succour they would ultimately ride me down. Succour was hopeless, and concealment I could find none.

The hot morning sun soon exhaled the mist upward, the kloof became more open and destitute of trees. I soon left it, and the mountains, too, behind, and for miles there stretched before me another karoo, or plain, covered by long grass and aromatic shrubs, by wild lilies and tulips of won-

drous beauty, but no shelter, unless a green ridge, some hundred feet in height, which rose in the midst of it, could afford it ; and that did not seem very probable.

Each time I gave a hurried glance behind, I could see that the figures of the men and horses were becoming more and more distinct as they neared me, and ere long their cries of triumph came plainly to my ear. Flight seemed useless ; yet life is precious—oh, most precious in such a time—so I continued to ride blindly and breathlessly on.

“This day,” thought I, “may—nay, too probably must—see me perish by a miserable and obscure death in the desert—a death of which Clarice can never, never know. I shall disappear—be mourned for a time, and then—forgot.”

The horsemen saw the ridge that rose before me, and, very naturally supposing that I must ride round it to the right or the left, they opened out, and rode in extended order, so that some should be close to my skirts if I took either way. But before I could determine what to do a final and unexpected catastrophe occurred to me.

The ridge in question consisted of high gray crags of basaltic rock, that rose perpendicularly from a green and sloping bank, which was thickly covered by dead pine trees. These stood up all bare and white, denuded of bark, like skeletons presenting a singular and ghastly appearance, as their leafless stems and branches glistened in the sunshine.

As I was nearing this place, a cry, or gasp, escaped me, and in a moment I found myself rolling prostrate on the ground. My horse had put his foot into a hole, and falling headlong forward, threw me, at the same time breaking the off foreleg just above the fetlock.

The animal was totally useless now, and my life I deemed as lost. Half stunned, I scrambled up and secured my rifle and hatchet. The poor horse was making ineffectual struggles to rise and get afoot, but always rolled heavily over on his side, moaning and whinnying most plaintively. I could not shoot him to end his misery, not having a cartridge to spare, and so I had to leave him to the vultures or wild animals. These I knew would soon end his sufferings by devouring him.

The yell with which my ferocious pursuers greeted this catastrophe acted as a spur upon me. I resolved to sell my life as dearly as possible, and began the ascent of the ridge on foot with all speed, seeking to reach a chasm or cleft in the rocks, where I might defend myself till my last cartridge was expended.

"To cover—to cover!" said I, aloud, in my excitement. "To cover while there is yet time, Dick Haddon," for I had acquired a habit of communing with myself when alone.

This rocky ridge was about two hundred feet in height, and in form and aspect closely resembled the well-known crags of Salisbury which overhang the city of Edinburgh. Through the intertwined branches of the dead pines—which were of great size and age—over the rough stone and long karoo grass that covered the slope, I scrambled upward, and ere long found myself at the base of the basaltic cliffs, just about the time when the foremost of the Caffres had dismounted at the bottom of the slope, and was haltering his horse to a skeleton tree.

The cleft, or chasm, was a natural split in the rocks, about six feet broad, but of great depth—some thirty feet or so, and open at the top—a point which could not be reached in any way, as the basaltic cliffs ascended sheer upwards, and even impended a little. Behind, the rock was totally impracticable of ascent, as it rose sheer like a wall from the karoo, or rather from the grove of dead trees; so I could neither be assailed in rear or on the flank, and for a defence to the front I now bent all my energies.

Including Adrian Africander, my pursuers were four and twenty in number, armed with assegais and muskets. That they had not already used the latter—as I had long been within range—surprised me; but it soon became apparent that they were without ammunition.

Retiring into the chasm, I proceeded in breathless haste to pile across its narrowest part a barricade of loose stones about three feet high, and I had barely achieved its formation when a yell pierced my ears, and the woolly head, the white teeth

and gleaming eyes, of a dusky Amaponda Caffre appeared at the lower end of my fortress.

There was a whizzing sound, and launched with deadly force, an iron-headed assegai came crash on the rocks beside me. As he was raising his arm to hurl another, I fired, aiming low, for the life lies low in a Caffre, as we say in the bush. He suddenly stooped to elude the ball, which consequently pierced his brain, and the dusky savage, after bounding convulsively into the air, fell crashing among the trees below, dead as a stone, while I instantly reloaded, and resolved never to empty both barrels at once, if I could avoid doing so.

Oh, what a yell was that which now rose into the clear welkin—a yell fierce and savage as the hot passions which roused it, and seemed to pierce my ears, and make my heart tingle.

“Hah!” muttered I, through my clenched teeth, “let the women of the Amapondas count their slain and weep, slain by the white man, alone, unfriended, unaided, and well nigh defenceless! Curse them! curse them; the cold-blooded, cruel, and unrelenting savages—more cruel even than the lion and leopard of their native forests.”

Another and another Caffre bounded up and launched his assegai; but the fate of the first rendered them cautious, and dreading my fire they were too quick in appearing and disappearing to launch their weapons with anything like precision. But I saw with increased anxiety and alarm that the assegais of these Amapondas were unusually formidable, being fully six feet long, with iron spear-heads one-fourth of that length inserted into the shaft, and all too evidently poisoned.

I know that for this purpose they used a subtle and deadly combination of animal, vegetable, and mineral poisons, procured from the cobra di capella and puff adder, from the roots of a species of cactus, and from copper ore. I knew too well that if wounded by one of these—even by the most trifling puncture—I was a dead man!

All remained quiet for a time, till there rang a triple yell.

Three Caffres abreast sprang up at the end of the chasm



and launching their assegais, were about to rush on me, covered by their shields, and armed with their knobkerries or war clubs, but they jostled each other, and when I fired again, the bullet killed one and wounded another, who, making a clutch at the kaross of his third comrade, they all tumbled down the rocks together.

"I have still twenty at least against me," thought I, while reloading the right barrel again; but I had barely done this when another assailant came, whose weapon was a pistol, the ball from which splintered on the stones of my barricade, and so great were the haste, the terror, and confusion of the marksman, that he fell forward into the chasm and hurt himself severely.

"Ach Altmichtig! verdamte Bergschotten!" he exclaimed. "Come on, come on, he's here!"

He was Adrian Africander.

A glow of vengeance came into my heart when I remembered all the kindness I had for years bestowed upon him, who now pursued me almost to death. I lodged the contents of my left barrel fairly in his body, and after writhing for a time in great agony he expired.

Now that blood had been shed these savages would never relinquish the attack so long as one of them remained to avenge the last who fell.

Once more the savage yells pierced the sky, as a fifth Caffre fell, shot through the breast, from whence the blood almost spouted over me as though from a syringe; and I heard his body go crashing among the dry branches far down below.

This occurred about midday, and then another, drunk with hempseed—maddened for the purpose, apparently—came bounding in the chasm, armed with a knife and war-club. My bullet, short though the distance, glanced obliquely on his shield of rhinoceros hide, and only caused him to stagger; but, ere he could recover himself, I thrust one of the poisoned assegais into his body, and hurled him with my foot into the profundity below.

After this, more than an hour passed without my being

molested again, and all remained quiet. I heard only their voices at times, but could make out nothing of what they intended to do. By their continued presence, however, it was evident that they had not relinquished the attack.

Were they waiting quietly to starve me into a surrender, or were they deliberately making some chosen man or men drunk with hempseed, to rush with mad courage on their doom and me?

The shadows began to fall eastward. I could see from the chasm—where, with ears intent on every sound, and eyes intent on every object, I sat with cocked rifle, crouched behind my barricade—the flat and fertile karoo I had traversed, and might never traverse more.

Another hour and another were passed in the keenest anxiety. Still the savages were about me, and still I could hear their guttural voices mingling with the Dutch gibberish and pigeon-English of the Hottentots, amid a great crashing of branches and the falling of dead trees, the skeleton roots of which were easily upturned from the loose, light soil, and more easily still from the bare rocks round which, in the time of their life and greenery, they had twined.

What were these Amapondas about? Forming a species of scaling-ladders, perhaps; but such were useless, as they could ascend without them.

At last the sun set; the shadows began to deepen fast, and now, creeping to the verge of the chasm, I peeped over the dead body of Africander, and with horror discovered the trap or fate, they were preparing for me.

All round the base of the insulated mass of rock, but chiefly to its windward side, these active and artful savages had piled vast numbers of dead trees, together with heaps of dry karoo-grass, fir-cones, and leaves; and, without doubt, were intending to fire the whole when duly prepared, for the purpose of suffocating me, or smoking me out—perhaps of roasting me alive.

For some minutes I was utterly bewildered on discovering this unexpected measure, for which they had with due pre-

caution removed all their horses to a place at some distance on the plain.

My past life had rendered me full of expedients, and apt to prompt and bold decision, so now my resolution was taken at once. The darkness had set in, and I knew that for hours there would be no moon visible.

Untwisting a cartridge, I mixed the powder of it with some of the blood which had flowed from the wound of Africander, with which I smeared my face and ears, shuddering with disgust as I did so.

By concealing my colour, I resolved, if seen, to pass in the dark for a Caffre, and to complete the disguise borrowed Africander's kaross, a short cloak of zebra-skin. On my back I slung my rifle, and prepared thus to steal downward among those who were intent on my destruction, with my hatchet in one hand and a poisoned assegai in the other.

To divert the attention of all, or of any who might be watching my retreat from the base of the rock I lifted up the dead body of the Hottentot, and uttering a shout flung it headlong down among them. This was a most unexpected event as they had forgotten all about him, or the fact that his body had been up beside me ; and all rushed with tremendous cries to the spot where it fell.

The time was one of dreadful excitement to me. I stole out, crept softly downward on my hands and knees, crawling amid the very trees which were piled up to destroy me, under or over the stems and between the branches, often close to the toiling savages, till I was among the long grass of the plain, and I heard the voices of my besiegers die away behind me, as I stole away to where their horses, four and twenty in number, where standing, all linked together.

As I drew near the horses, an armed Hottentot, whom I had failed to perceive before, started forward, with a bearing of suspicion and hostility. Something in my air, or the outline of my figure, dissatisfied him ; and he was just opening his huge mouth to utter a shout of alarm, when I thrust the assegai into it, and he fell wallowing in blood, while I, excited to the utmost degree, drew a long and painful breath.

I cut the rope that linked the horses together, and mounting the nearest one, rode off at full speed, followed by the whole like a herd of wild cattle, for fear was added to the fury with which they galloped when the dead trees were set on fire and a roaring pyramid of flames rose around the solitary rock in the plain.

I heard the fierce crackle of that red and flaming sheet of fire, which cast my dark and absurdly elongated shadow before me over the wild prairie. I heard a shrill yell of astonishment and dismay from the Caffres for the loss of their horses, and then every sound was lost to me, in the dull and monotonous rush of the hoofs, while, surrounded by the whole riderless troop, I rode fast and furiously towards the west.

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MADDENED or encouraged in this wild race by each other's presence, the horses flew on, many of them neighing and snorting as if in sport or triumph. Often they pressed so close upon the flanks of the one I rode that I was fearfully crushed and its speed was impeded ; but anon the wild herd would open out, yet all press on together in this bewildering and aimless race.

In less than ten minutes the flaming rock and yelling horde were three miles behind us. My horse was not pursuing exactly the route I wished him to do. I pulled strongly on the bridle, but pulled in vain, for the animal seemed to have a head of iron. Instead of obeying the reins, he only gave a snort of defiance, for he had got the bit between his teeth, and laying back his ears wickedly flew on like the demon horse of some fantastic story or German ballad.

I endeavoured to turn him by wrenching each rein alternately. In this process the bit-ring gave way, the bit itself slipped from the animal's mouth, the head-stall parted with the strain and my horse all unbridled, was utterly beyond my control.

I still retained the useless bridle in my hands, and held on by my knees and stirrups, for I dared not throw myself off

while the now free horse flew madly onwards. I conceived the idea of stunning the animal by a blow with the handle of my hatchet between the ears but this only served to excite his fury and accelerate his speed.

With a sudden bound he dashed on, distancing his snorting companions, through rivers, over a vast plain, until he halted, in a wild and silent place, a few miles distant from a range of mountains, over which the pale moon began to rise.

As he paused in his mad career, I sprang from the saddle and knee-haltered him.

One circumstance I had to thank him for, at all events. He had borne me to a most satisfactory distance—some twenty miles, at least—from the now dismounted Amaponda Caffres ; but how little could I anticipate that he was bearing me once more to Mariqua.

I was breathless, faint, and weary.

In a runnel I gladly quenched my thirst, and freed myself of the horrid paste with which I had so successfully disguised my colour ere leaving that perilous rock in the plain, and now repose was necessary till daybreak when I could look around me. As usual, when encamping in the bush, I cut down with my hatchet a quantity of brushwood, and placed this in a circle round the spot where my horse and I were to pass the night together, for wild animals are always in fear of traps and snares, and though they might with ease have leaped over my frail barrier, they would not, I knew, venture through it.

I cut a quantity of grass for my horse, and after a final examination of my loaded rifle, and thanking heaven that I was again free, lay down to sleep, and slept soundly, too.

When I awoke, the sun was shining brightly, and the air was warm and balmy. Starting up, I looked around me. I was in a wild place, covered with foliage and luxuriant greenery, but I could see that the place was the abode of snakes, scorpions, and puff-adders innumerable, so that it was a miracle I had passed the night unbitten.

By a single bullet I brought down a fine guinea-fowl when on the wing, and had it plucked and prepared for my break-

fast, cooking it ere it was cold. I was too much famished to be very fastidious. A fire I made readily enough by untwisting a cartridge and sprinkling the powder among some dead leaves and dry branches. Therein I broiled my fowl in such a fashion as might have made Soyer faint ; but, nevertheless, I relished it greatly, and on this bird and a bunch of wild, honey-pot grapes made a regular bushranger's breakfast.

My next task was to repair my bridle as well as I could, and remounting, to set out on my journey once more. On clearing the bush among which I had passed the night, I found my runaway nag had halted just in time, for I was but a quarter of a mile or so distant from the edge of a long and lofty range of cliffs, up the back or gradually sloping ascent of which he had galloped.

From these cliffs I had an extensive view of a vast green plain, bounded by a chain of hills that seemed faint and blue in the distance, and over all that space my eye wandered, searching, but in vain, for a village, a kraal, a spire, a windmill, even the smoke of a solitary house, or anything that savoured of culture or civilization ; and my heart began to sink, for I had neither guide, map, nor pocket compass, and had now little more than a dozen cartridges remaining.

And lower still did my heart sink, when, on drawing close to the cliff's giddy verge, I discovered what was in the immediate foreground.

I shrank back instinctively, and then creeping forward on my face peeped over again.

There, in a green place overhung by the rocks, and about a hundred and fifty feet below me, were a party of armed Caffres—twenty or more, at least—squatted round a fire, at which they were preparing a repast, composed of birds and other animals recently shot by them, and the odour of their cooking came plainly upward to my olfactory nerves on the soft morning air. Their horses were knee-haltered near.

If mine were to neigh but once, they would discover me ; and it was a singular chance they had not heard the rifle shot by which I brought my breakfast down.

This group was startling enough in itself ; but what were my emotions on recognizing among them the figure of Vonga, and in another, whose smaller and more graceful form was partly hidden by a large striped European shawl, Mariqua.

Mariqua here in pursuit of me, doubtless, and with intentions that were not all loving probably ; for I now perceived that my quondam wife was armed with a rifle, and it was a weapon which I knew she could use to some purpose.

To advance would be to attract the attention of those whose solicitude about my movements would soon prove very troublesome ; to retire would bring me again among the Amapondas, who were now doubtless following up the trail of their runaway horses, and were perhaps within a few miles of me. So for some minutes after making this startling and most unwelcome discovery I was completely bewildered.

I knew that, to reach the provinces of Calesberg or Richmond, my route must lie south-west, and that ultimately I should certainly gain the shelter of civilized men at last ; yet my way must lie through that very plain which my pursuers could overlook.

One fact was clear enough—the danger of lingering where I was. Already the Caffres had begun their breakfast, and some were actually preparing to move. I could see the impatient Mariqua hand her rifle to a Fingo slave, and mounting a pure white horse—Mariqua, doubtless now inflamed by pride, passion, and revenge, ‘like a beautiful wild beast upon the trail.’

I imagined I could see—even at the distance we were apart—a cruel look in her dark eyes when she handled her rifle—a look like that of *Miami*, in the “Green Bushes,” when she gazed at her recreant lover.

Compunction was past now, and flight was still my sole object—flight and escape. A long belt of forest, that extended southward from the base of the cliffs, seemed to offer me shelter and concealment. Descending with all the speed I could permit my nag to use on such steep and broken ground, I made a detour of a mile or two

round the angle of the cliffs, rode through the wood, and after an hour or so of devious and troublesome progress, impeded by underwood below, baboon ropes and branches above, by fallen trees and the wondrous luxuriance of the foliage, I was once more on the open plain, and free, as I hoped, to pursue my lonely way unseen and uninterrupted; but I hoped for this in vain, for barely had I emerged from the wood, when a yell pierced my ear, and a musket shot whistled past me, barking a mimosa tree close by.

Turning furiously, I unslung my rifle. About fifty paces from me was a mounted Caffre, whom I recognized to be one of Vonga's men—an advanced scout, apparently—galloping rearward at full speed, no doubt to announce that he had seen me, and to state where my trail would be found.

His death would be my only safety. I levelled at him fairly between my horse's ears, and fired both barrels; but either it was the rearing of the animal, or that my nerves were unstrung by all I had undergone, for, though a dead shot, I missed him. Reloading in hot haste, and using my knife as a goad, being without spurs, I urged my horse to his full speed over the plain, towards where the blue mountain ridges were rising, and for nearly twenty miles I rode on at a gallop, stopping only at an occasional time to breathe the animal, to look back, or to avoid some rent in the dry soil or jungle, where perhaps the puff-adder and scolopendra lurked.

On looking back about midday, on the distant verge of the level plain, I could see a line of black dots appearing, and once or twice a flash of light—the silver sheen of a gun-barrel. These were doubtless my pursuers, Vonga and his men, coming on.

And now before me stretched a vast river, rolling in sunny light from the south to the north, and barring all further flight—the Great Orange River, I supposed it to be, and such it proved eventually—and the sight of that broad expanse of silvery water filled me with despair.

I reined in my horse above the stream, and a cold perspi-



ration broke over me with the thoughts of recapture—torture—death.

I conceived the idea of urging my horse into the stream, which at its narrowest part seemed to be fully one hundred and eighty yards broad ; but I knew not his power of swimming, or his tricks. I was little or no swimmer, and the brute might “turn a turtle” with me, and leave me to drown. Seen now, and with these unwearying savages on my trail, concealment on the north bank was hopeless.

Besides, my way lay beyond this bridgeless stream, for there were those whom I now despaired of eluding unless I crossed it.

“To cross it ; but how—how ? Heaven help me ! heaven aid me !” I exclaimed, with fervour, and leaped from my horse.

The invocation was not uttered in vain, for suddenly a happy thought inspired me.

Close by the river bank there grew several large trees covered with a thick rind, or bark, resembling that of the cork wood ; and with my hatchet I proceeded to cut off a flake of this, about six feet long and three feet broad. Green and full of sap it was, and I had trouble in getting it detached unbroken, and in such a state as to suit my purpose ; but it was soon achieved, and as there were neither sight nor sound of my pursuers yet, I proceeded to work quietly and steadily to form it into an impromptu boat, by tying a tough vine trailer round it amidships to keep the bark curved in its natural form.

I then stopped up the ends by huge plugs, or masses of the thick red clay that lay by the riverside. Next, cutting a branch to serve as a paddle, I stepped in and shoved off, in the hope that, if I failed to cross the stream, I might at least reach an islet that lay in the mid-channel.

My progress in such a craft was slow—slow as the crawling of a snail, though I paddled vigorously on each side alternately, and got it out into the mid-stream, when, with intense mortification and anxiety, I saw the clay dropping out and

disappearing fast from stem and stern ; but a more pressing fear came over me when I heard the yells of Vonga's men becoming louder and louder, and saw them, their horses covered with white foam, their eyes and teeth shining, their crane's feathers and tiger-skin karosses, their brandished assegais and levelled rifles, their wild, ferocious, and most fantastic *tout ensemble*—and, horror ! there, too, was Mariqua—as they came crashing down the steep bank at full speed, and leaping from their horses, betook them to their weapons, sending shot after shot, and making the water start in silver spouts around me.

### CHAPTER XXXIX.

OFTEN have these Caffrarian episodes come back to me in my dreams, causing me to start and wake with horror and affright : for again I seem to see the brawny and naked forms, so lithe, so sinewy, and shining with oil, their fierce visages and crane's feathers, their gleaming eyes and sharpset teeth ; and I seem also to hear their yells, with the crack of the rifle and the hiss of the launched assegai, in my dreamy ear. And Adrian Africander and the day in the chasm often come in those visions of the night, and the black ingratitude of this “man and brother,” as the preachers would call him, was indeed bitter as the winter wind, though fearfully avenged at last.

Whether it was the fierce impatience of Vonga's men, or that they were bad marksmen, I know not ; but, thank heaven, all their shots fell wide of the mark, and untouched by them, I paddled my frail craft, which was filling fast, towards a rocky islet, and had barely reached that spot and swung myself by the branch of a drooping tree upon dry land, when the roll of bark which had so well served my purpose filled with water and sank slowly out of sight.

The islet was a mere rock, about a quarter of an acre in extent, but covered with verdure, for there the snowy jasmine, the blue plumbago, and the pink geranium were all growing together, and the place was literally alive with wild doves,

which rose into the air like a white cloud, and flew hither and thither with affright when the muskets from the bank I had quitted opened fire upon me, sending streaks of red fire and spouts of white smoke out of the green jungle and mangroves, while the reports rang in the welkin, and the round bullets starred the rocky face of the isle.

Bathed in perspiration, for the heat of the day was intense and overpowering, I lay down on my face under cover of the rocky crest of the place, and selecting one or two Caffres whose woolly caputs were more prominently visible than others for a quiet pot shot, I sent a pair of conical rifle balls at them, and had the satisfaction to see them toss up their black hands, and tumble over with a yell that indicated agony and fear.

The men of the chief, Vonga—who, like Mariqua, never sought concealment, but rode about gesticulating and exposed to my fire, of which they evidently had no fear—manifested no intention of swimming off to the isle. Perhaps they were deterred by the presence of two huge hippopotami, each weighty as five or six oxen, whom the sound of the firing had brought out of the tall herbage of the fens and the muddy ooze of the river. One of those enormous and most repulsive-looking brutes, with a brown and hairless body fully fourteen feet long, kept wading close by the islet, as if to bar any attempt I might make to escape on the southern side.

I dared not trust myself to attempt the passage by swimming ; my skill in that art was small, and with an infuriated hippopotamus close to one's skirts, the idea was not to be put in practice. Besides, it would be most perilous for me to have my rifle and small stock of ammunition wetted by water.

How was I to pass the night, and how the succeeding day ? If long detained on the isle there was every prospect of my being starved to death ; so now I found myself in a predicament fully more awkward than when besieged by the Amapondas on the nameless rock in the plain. Had my frail

bark but borne me fairly across, I might yet, though afoot, have reached some settlement or larger village.

If I had been aware that, though broad, the Orange River was there remarkably shallow, I would have made an attempt to ford it in the face of all their musketry ; but I knew nothing of this till about sunset, when the purple shadows were falling on its crimsoned flow, and a wild cry of joy involuntarily escaped me on beholding—what ?

A party of our own 12th Lancers, who, with all their red and white swallow-tailed banneroles fluttering gaily on the wind, white linen puggerees tied round their caps, and in their gay uniform—blue faced with scarlet—dashed at a rapid trot down to the river's edge, where they speedily extended in skirmishing order, and with their short carbines, which they carried unslung, with the butt resting on the right thigh, they opened a rattling fire upon the men of Vonga, who immediately mounted and fled, carrying off with them Mariqua, whom I never saw more, and certainly had no desire to see.

"There is a white man on the rock in the river," cried a voice in English, which came most sweetly, and as music, to my ear, showing that they had seen or discovered me.

"I have been a prisoner, and escaped," cried I joyfully.

"With your life ? Well, by Jove ! that is a wonder !" replied the officer in command.

"What force are you ?" I asked.

"Her Majesty's 12th Lancers."

"So I see, sir ; but are other troops at hand ?"

"Yes. A great field force is coming on fast. We are the advanced guard of the army, under his Excellency the Governor-General in person. Are the Caffres in force beyond you ?"

"No. Are you marching against Sandilli ?"

"He was used up long ago. We are moving against Mosheesh, the great Basuto chief, and cross the Orange River to-night."

"But how ?"

"By fording it."

"Is it so shallow?" I asked with astonishment.

"Our engineers say so."

On hearing this I at once rushed into the stream, which came nearly up to my armpits, and forgetting all about the two riverhorses, gained in safety the other side, where the wondering lancers gathered about me.

Seeing the miserable aspect I presented, the officer kindly gave me some cognac from his flask, and proffered his cigar-case, a luxury I was not slow in accepting.

"Are the 74th Highlanders with you?" I asked.

"Yes; and the 2nd, or Queen's Own, too."

"Clarice, Clarice," thought I, with joy; "then I shall have tidings of you from Douglas at last."

And already her soft smile, her pale beauty, and her dark but lovelit eyes, seemed to come before me.

"Well, my friend, how long have you been in the hands of those confounded niggers?" asked the officer, a handsome young fellow, eyeing me with much interest and commiseration, but through his glass, nevertheless.

"Since the storming of the Amatolas."

"In the month of June?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens! and this is now November—five months."

"Nearly."

"Stay; a thought strikes me. Are you Haddon, late of the —th Fusiliers, who was serving as a volunteer with the 74th Highlanders?"

"The same. I was wounded—stunned by a blow of a war-club—in the advance, and was left behind."

"And how were you spared?" he asked with growing interest.

"I fell into unusually kind hands," said I, loth that the name of Mariqua should appear in my narrative at that time.

"I must beg to congratulate you on your preservation. You were reported as dead—to have been cruelly tortured to

death, in fact, by old Sandilli ; and a very touching and flattering biography of you appeared in the *Cape Argus*," continued the officer, laughing. "But my party forms the advanced guard, so we must cross the river here, and feel our way on the opposite bank. The head of the first brigade is already close at hand. Good-bye for the present. Close in men ! forward from the right by threes !"

And bowing to me, he led the way through the stream, which, much to my surprise, in the deepest part of the ford barely flowed to his holster flaps ; and ere long I saw the banneroles and bright lance heads of his party above the mangroves on the opposite bank, as they rode in extended order slowly over the ground by which I had fled in such haste to the river.

My first reflection was of how the apparently authentic notice of my death would affect Clarice—my poor Clarice !—and I felt keen sorrow for the tears she must have shed, and the grief she must have endured.

Ascending a little eminence which commanded a view of the plain beyond the river, my heart beat lightly and happily when I saw our troops advancing on the line of march, with their rifles at the trail, but with drums beating and colours flying. They were formed in two brigades, the first consisting of the 2d, or Queen's Regiment, and 74th Highlanders, under Colonel Macduff of the latter corps ; the second was formed by the 43d, or Monmouthshire Light Infantry, and the 73d, or Perthshire ; then the Rocket Battery, the Rifle Brigade, in their sombre green uniform, the gay 12th Lancers, the Cape Corps, and the Artillery, all toiling on under a blazing sun which gave more than one man a fatal *coup de soleil* for they had marched for more than twenty miles through a district that was literally a burning desert, and now their uniforms were powdered white by the whirlwinds of gravel and dust, amid which their arms and appointments would flash occasionally, though all else was veiled in obscurity.

On they came, marching sturdily and steadily towards the

broad current of the magnificent Orange River, and now hastening towards the 74th Highlanders, I scanned their ranks for the tall and stalwart figure of my friend Douglas; but I looked along the line of captains in vain. Had he been killed, or had he died of the wound I had seen him receive?

Notwithstanding my wretched plight, I was soon recognized by many of the officers and men of the 74th, and loud exclamations of welcome, surprise, and warm congratulation greeted me as they marched past.

"What wonder is this? Haddon—Dick Haddon alive and hearty? How has all this come about, old fellow?" cried the jovial Jack Bonteine, who, though an officer, had, for his own comfort, a travelling knapsack strapped to his back, a canvass havresack for provisions slung over one shoulder, his cloak, sword belt, canteen, and telescope slung over the other, and looked nearly as dirty and hairy, and quite as brown as myself, by long exposure.

In a few words I repeated to him all I had cared to tell the lancer, and added—

"But where is Douglas? I do not see him here. He's not dead, I hope?"

"Dead? Not at all. He never was better or more happy in his life than when we saw him last. But he has got a staff appointment, and has cut the Cape and the 74th together."

"Gone?"

"To Jamaica."

"When?"

"About two months ago."

"To Jamaica?" I repeated, almost mechanically. "And what of Major Carysfort?"

"Dead, poor fellow. I think he died soon after we carried the Amatola Heights. He expired at an obscure Dutch village, and was buried by the boors."

"Fanny—his wife, I mean."

"Ah, la belle Fanny is now Mrs. Gerard Douglas, and has accompanied the accomplished officer who bears that name

to the West Indies, taking with her that pretty sister, whom, perhaps, you may remember."

"Miss Haywood?"

"Exactly. Nice girl, rather."

"Whew!" thought I. "Here are strange tidings—my Clarice gone to Jamaica!"

The first brigade halted now, preparatory to crossing the river, and I felt like one in a dream when many officers of the 74th came round me in a group. Tall Archy Campbell, Forbes the doctor, little Ensign Calder, and others, all bronzed, bearded, in patched uniforms, tattered tartan and tarnished embroidery, anxious to learn how I had been spared the terrible fate to which the prisoners were subjected, and their wonder seemed to increase on learning that I owed my life to the care of the merciless Sandilli.

"It is passing strange," said Bonteine. "Did you see any of his wives, of whom he is said to have as many as a farm-yard chanticleer, and to use them as that anointed king of Cockayne, the Defender of the Faith, did his?"

"I saw none, I believe. He had me secluded at his home farm, in the Gulu Valley. Among his own people he does not seem to be a bad sort of fellow, and he fully lives in the bosoms and affections of his followers. Douglas and the ladies," I added, "would sail from Cape Town, I presume?"

"Exactly. On board of a fine clipper ship, the *Eugenie*."

"And what has become of Percival Graves?"

"He of the white kids and parted hair?"

"I don't see him among the staff."

"Oh, Graves got tired of the Cape when he found that the fair Haywood was going; so he got sick leave on a certificate from Forbes here that a sea voyage was necessary for the restoration of his health, and he, too, sailed in the *Eugenie*."

"With them?"

"Yes."

This information struck painfully a new or rather an old chord in my heart, and the thoughts flashed upon me rapidly: Clarice and Graves thrown together, so perilously as people



always are on board of a ship, myself supposed to be dead, and she quite open to a favourable offer from her old admirer, too, the handsome and wealthy young Guardsman.

"Was the notice of my death circumstantial?" I asked, with a ghastly attempt at a smile.

"Most circumstantial," said the doctor.

"In what manner?"

"It was to the effect that the discovery of a forage cap of the 74th Highlanders, recognized by the quartermaster as one which he had given to Captain Haddon, rendered it certain that the remains found in the wood beyond the Amatolas, pegged to the ground and half devoured by birds and jackals, were those of that unfortunate gentleman."

"Well, Bonteine," I resumed, still seeking for information to feed and increase my jealous doubts and fears, "and how comes it that you and others allowed a handsome girl like Miss Haywood to leave the colony unwedded?"

"We are not marrying men in the 74th," said Bonteine.

"And these not being the piping times of peace, we have quite enough to do," said the doctor, "and must leave love and matrimony to the idle."

"Ungallant speech," lisped Ensign Calder.

"Was not Graves supposed to be tender on Miss Haywood?" said I.

"Yes, awfully spooney; but there was another fellow whom she picked up somewhere about Graham's Town. He accompanied her to the coast, and also went with them all in the *Eugenie*; and he contrived to be always so much about Miss Haywood that poor Graves hadn't the ghost of a chance."

"Another. Who was he?" I asked calmly.

"A kind of Dutch fellow," continued Bonteine, in his rattling, off-hand way; "a wealthy merchant, rumour said."

"But how was he named?"

"Mynheer van Neukerque."

"*Whom* do you say?" I exclaimed in a tone so startling that all surveyed me with surprise, and Bonteine slowly repeated the name, adding—

"He was a strange fellow, and Fanny Carysfort used to say, quoting from a book, that she thought 'he was just one of those wicked people in whom one feels a sort of interest in spite of one's self.'"

"Was his Christian name Schalk?"

"I don't know; but why so many questions, old fellow, eh?"

I felt utterly breathless and bewildered on hearing the revival of this strange and terrible patronymic.

"We have not much time for talking just now," said Bonteine, leisurely lighting a cigar. "The Queen's are about to pass the river, and our turn will come next."

"But this Van Neukerque. What manner of man was he? What was he like?" I persisted.

"Was, say you?"

"Yes."

"Is, you mean. I suppose the fellow is still alive."

"Don't banter, please, Bonteine. I knew a person of this name, and have special reasons for asking."

"He was altogether an indescribable kind of man."

"Say like a person in H.S.M.S.," suggested Calder, the flippant ensign.

"I do not understand, sir," said I stiffly.

"Calder means in his Satanic Majesty's service," said Bonteine, laughing; "and, sooth to say, he was pale, grim, and sombre enough to have acted the part of Mephistopheles in *Faust*."

I asked no more questions. I had heard quite enough to perplex and bewilder me.

Carysfort dead, Douglas married to Fanny, Clarice gone to Jamaica, accompanied by the insinuating fop, Graves, and a mysterious personage picked up in the vicinity of Graham's Town—a Dutchman, named Neukerque. I could not help associating the latter with that terrible creature who figured in the narrative of Doctor Bruine Kasteel at Cradock, whom Speke van Bommel had pistoled, and whose body, prior to interment, I had seen Adrian Africander decapitate with a hatchet.

The flowing river, the columns of horse and foot, the train of artillery and waggons, the far extent of plain, and the blue sky and distant hills, seemed to be all racing round me. I feared that I had been struck by a *coup de soleil*, or was becoming insane, so much was I disturbed by my own thoughts.

His Excellency the Governor-General and the staff, before whom I was brought for examination as to what I had seen and where I had been beyond the Orange River, found my replies so incoherent and so wide of the purpose, that I was abruptly dismissed from their presence, and not knowing what to do or where to go, I sat under a palm tree, gazing vacantly and dreamily at the army fording the shining river under a scorching sun.

The pencilled letters of Clarice and Douglas, with Mark Sharkeigh's confession—written, as related, in the wretched creature's blood—for a time the only links between civilisation, a past existence, and me—had reached the land dry in the pocket of my tattered blouse, and I now prepared to secure them in my Caffre head-dress, prior to recrossing the river, for as yet I had no place of abode, no settled home, but the camp of the 74th Highlanders.

## CHAPTER XL.

A SINGULAR sight the troops presented when crossing the stream. The 2d, or Queen's Regiment, was the first corps to move forward, and then followed the 74th Highlanders, with whom I crossed.

At the top of the path, or track, leading to the ford, the latter took off their boots, socks, and tartan trews, rolled their ammunition pouches in their blankets, which they tied around their heads or to the top of their knapsacks; the boots and socks were tied to the muzzles of their Minie rifles (the officers carried theirs on the points of their claymores), and in this quaint fashion, with arms sloped, the column marched right through the river.

The waggons and field pieces were slowly run into the water

by drag-ropes, and were then pulled across by relays of soldiers and Hottentots.

Tents were soon pitched, and our clothing dried fast in the sunshine. The place where the army passed the night was rendered pleasant and beautiful by the foliage of many olive groves and pale green willows, amid which the snow-white tents—particularly those of the 12th Royal Lancers—made a picturesque scene. These groves were teeming with brilliant flamingoes and sugar-birds, and the shrill pipe of the cicada was heard from every branch. The banks of the river there were green and shady, too, and along its margin in many places the agates, cornelians, and green serpentines lay so thick among the shining pebbles, that we might have filled our havresacks with them, had not ration beef and biscuits been more valuable commodities to us there.

This, as it proved, was fated to be my last night in camp.

The officers messed by companies, each captain and his two subalterns having one common box of provisions and stock of wine. Bonteine, Campbell, and Calder invited me to chum with them in their tent; and then, for the first time after nearly five months, I enjoyed a meal that smacked of cooking and civilization.

The doctor and one or two others joined us, and while we had broiled beef, fried baryas, or mullet, fresh from the adjacent river, we drank Cape smoke or brandy and water from tin pots, canteens, teacups, and so forth, for there was but little crystal in the camp.

Amid much of that heedless joviality and frivolous banter which form the staple feature in camp and barrack life, I heard, after telling my own story, a narrative of all that had passed during my captivity.

The Caffre corps had been everywhere destroyed by the troops, and Lieutenant-Colonel Fordyce, of the 74th, had fallen at the storming of the Water Kloof.

"Poor Fordyce," said the doctor; "he lived for a quarter of an hour after receiving his wound, and his last words were 'Take care of my poor regiment. Now I am ready!'" and

expired. He was a brave soldier, and a true Christian gentleman."

Then I heard the terrible story of the loss of the Birkenhead transport, and how, when she had gone to pieces on a sunken rock, three hundred and fifty-eight officers and soldiers of the 2nd, the 74th Highlanders, and other corps, stood in their ranks on deck, and went down into the deep without a cry or a murmur, content that the women and the little ones were saved by the boats.

When the ship's fate became sealed, by drum and bagpipe Major Seaton of the 74th "summoned all to the upper deck;" and promptly was that call obeyed, though every gallant heart there knew it was his death summons. There they stood, as if in battle array, a motionless mass of brave men—men who were *men* indeed. The ship every moment was going down and down; but there were no traitors, no cravens there. The women and children were got into the boats; there were no boats for the troops; but there was no panic, no blanched, pale, quivering lips among them. No saint ever died more simply, no martyr ever died more voluntarily, no hero ever died more firmly, no victim ever met fate in a more generous spirit of self-immolation, than the soldiers of the Birkenhead transport.

With his Highland pistols tied to his neck, the gallant-Seton and a few others struck out for the shore, only to become entangled among the slimy weeds and trailers that rose up a hundred feet in length from the bottom of that tropical sea, and to perish there miserably, a prey to the innumerable sharks.

"The story of their bravery and generosity," said Bonteine, "would fire even the heart of a Quaker; and that is saying a great deal."

"In anything wherein money is not concerned," added the doctor drily.

Then they detailed to me the storming of Macomo's stronghold, the six attacks on the Water Kloof, and all the operations of the army, down to the present march it was perform-

ing to attack the great Basuto chief, whose defeat would—as it ultimately did—put an end to the Caffre war.

“This long story of yours,” said young Calder, “is like one of old Somerset’s despatches, as dreary as the overture to Wagner’s *“Tannhäuser”*—about the most excruciating piece of music that ever was concocted by a meandering musician.”

“You are ennuyed, my little man,” retorted Bonteine.

“Not at all. I am jolly as a sandboy—as Sandilli himself,” replied the ensign, caressing what he supposed to be a buff-coloured moustache.

“Fanny—Mrs. Douglas, I mean—never saw Carysfort, I suppose, after his being wounded at the Dutch village?” said I, longing to hear more of those in whom I felt a deeper interest than for the details of a barbarous war.

“Never,” replied Bonteine; “and perhaps it was just as well.”

“Why?”

“I don’t think she could ever have cared much for Carysfort.”

“How do you think so?” I asked abruptly.

“I happened to be close by when Douglas dried the pretty widow’s tears,” said Bonteine, lowering his voice. “‘And after all that has passed, you love me still, Gerard?’ she said demurely, casting down her long eyelashes. ‘Passionately,’ responded our Captain of Highlanders. ‘I feel very grateful and happy, dearest,’ said she, ‘with the conviction of being loved by one so good, so gentle, and so kind as you.’ I was Douglas’s groomsman soon afterwards, and—What the deuce is that boy sniggering at?”

“At your love story, Bonteine—that is all,” replied the unabashed Ensign Calder; “so don’t quote the Mutiny Act about laughing at one’s superior officer. I knew that the fair Fanny was a bride the moment I saw her.”

“How? What should you know about it? You were on detachment at Fort Armstrong.”

“Her marriage ring looked so new, and fitted the tiny third finger so tightly.”

"It is a fine thing to talk rakishly, and it costs nothing but respectability," said the doctor gravely. "But pass that bottle, young fellow, and look sharp, please."

"And how about your wife's wedding ring, my lad?" asked Campbell, who had taken no part in this camp chaff.

"Wife! Don't think I shall ever have one, or go beyond an *affaire du cœur* with a handsome young flirt, married to a rich old party, having a good wine cellar, and no tattling incumbrances in the shape of children, to tell who kissed mamma's hand in the shrubbery. All such observant brats should be strangled."

"Listen to young morality fresh from Sandhurst," exclaimed the doctor.

"But a kiss of the hand is not a very deadly affair," said Bonteine, laughing.

"Don't encourage the boy to talk in this loose fashion," said the doctor angrily. "I am older than you, Calder—"

"More than twice my age, I should think."

"Yes—and age learns more than youth."

"Youth learns to love," lisped the ensign.

"Yes, and age learns to lose as well as to love," retorted Forbes, and his words, and still more his tone, told of some secret story, too sacred for the present company.

"Was the health of Miss Haywood impaired by what she had undergone?" I inquired, with an air of casual indifference, while lying on the green sward which formed the floor of the tent, imbibing with intense satisfaction the fragrance of a fine havannah.

"No. She looked a little pale, and perhaps careworn; but such might be expected."

"I'll swear that she blushed red enough when that fellow Graves kissed her," said the incorrigible ensign.

"How?—where?" asked Bonteine.

"How?—as people usually do; and where?—on the cheek."

"When, Mr. Calder?" I asked.

"On the day the Fingoes brought them into camp; but

we were all inclined to do the same thing, so overjoyed were we to see them alive and safe."

"On the cheek?" I repeated, with a sternness that I could not conceal.

"Yes. It seems to have made an impression upon you," continued the saucy Calder.

"How that brat's tongue runs on," growled Dr. Forbes.

"And Graves went with them to Jamaica?" I resumed.

"Yes," replied Bonteine, who went blundering on in a fashion quite as bad as Calder, talking barrack-room rubbish, perhaps, but such rubbish as proved very annoying to me—maddening, in fact. "Graves went with them—with her, I should say."

"Why?"

"Because, if they are not engaged they should be. We heard that you had been spoony on her; but so were others—some of the 12th Lancers, and one of the Rifles especially. Graves, however, was seldom away from her side after that hideous skeleton was found in the wood by Sergeant Burns of ours. He thought all was square then. I should know how engaged people look—have been engaged myself about ten times, but never was hooked yet, and I don't mean to be till I get my spurs by brevet or the murrain among the majors. How mighty and mysterious are the secrets of your engaged stupidities—how nicely they open pedal communications with one another, and squeeze hands behind curtains or under the tablecloth! I know all about that style of thing, and have done it scores of times, though engaged only ten times, as I have said."

I laughed incredulously, taking these speeches at their current value; but the Scotch doctor said, with one of his most saturnine grins:

"I can endorse his assertions of iniquity. He has got a diamond ring and a gold watch and appendages which to my certain knowledge at least ten girls have worn in succession."

"Every one of whom was spoony on yours truly, Jack Bonteine, till the route or letters of readiness came."



"Or till you got some one of ours who was on leave to telegraph, as your father or uncle, that you were about to be cut off with a shilling. Then the watch and ring were returned ; but they are as well known in most garrison towns as the goat of the Welsh Fusiliers."

"It is profanity in you, Forbes, to mention such tender mysteries. Yes," resumed the laughing Bonteine, "Graves went with *la belle* Clarice, and notwithstanding the Dutch—what was the fellow's name?"

"Van Neukerque," said I huskily.

"Yes ; being present, he will improve the golden opportunities—and we all know that they are manifold—afforded by a long voyage at sea. Pass the Cape smoke, Haddon. You don't drink, old fellow."

"Thanks," said I, and swallowed a bumper to hide or to drown my chagrin.

"Fill again, Haddon," said Bonteine ; "you look as if you lacked the Circean cup that cheers but not inebriates."

"Nay, but it does," said I, "if you read the classics aright."

"Bother the classics. Don't talk of them ; it makes me think of my old cramming and grinding days at Sandhurst," said Calder.

Poor rattlepated boy ! He perished next day of a sun-stroke when on the march, and was buried under a pine-tree in the wide and desert karoo over which I had so lately fled.

Undeterred by the troubles which had beset me, my first intention had been to accompany my old friends, the 74th, in the new campaign against Moshesh, the Basuto, to give one more clasp to the war medal which I knew to be my due, and to write by the first mail to Douglas and Clarice, at Jamaica ; but the information I had received, in the bantering manner just related, made a complete alteration in my plans ; and so, when next morning the tents were struck at daybreak, and the army resumed its march, I bade adieu to my whilom comrades, and taking advantage of the companionship and escort of some twenty men of the various corps, who, under an officer, were going back to the town of Burgh-

ersdorp, being found unfit for field service ; and with something of a sorrowful heart, I heard the wail of the pipe and the tap of the drum die away by the banks of the Great Orange River, as we turned on our homeward march over the almost pathless karoo.

## CHAPTER XLI.

PEOPLE rarely, if ever, fall in love with those they have known long.

I had been known to Clarice Haywood for years—since her girlhood almost. We had loved each other, and been separated by misfortune, but to meet again under sudden and extraordinary circumstances. Now, once more were we parted ; to her apparently for ever, by my supposed death, for so sure were all of that event, that Douglas's company of the 74th had fired three volleys over the remains of Hans Bruine Kasteel as mine.

Percival Graves was with her, and he, though a fop, was insinuating in manner, handsome in figure, and every way an eligible person. She was alone in the world ; her only sister was married again, and what more probable than that now she might fall in love with this new suitor, and commit to oblivion, if she could, the memory of the old ? I even imagined all that my old friend Douglas might have to urge upon the subject.

Then, what weight was I to attach to the mention of that obnoxious name of Neukerque in conjunction with hers ? Was it reality, or the mere rantipole of Bonteine and the thoughtless boy Calder, that such a person hovered about Clarice, and had actually sailed with her to the West Indies ? And who was he, the unprepossessing stranger who had so suddenly turned up, and in the neighbourhood of Graham's Town too ?

This new feature in our fortunes filled me with perplexing thoughts, from which I sought to shrink ; but they would not be cast aside, and rose hydra-headed in my mind.

Nevertheless, whatever might happen, I was bound to follow

her, and I burned now with longing and impatience to reach the coast, to embark and set forth upon the sea ; but when thinking of the distance to be traversed by land, and still more by water, my heart sank within me, for the time that it would consume might serve to destroy all.

From the Orange River to Algoa Bay was a distance of two hundred and fifty miles ; thence to Cape Town, where, alone I could hope to find a vessel for the West Indies, was four hundred and fifty miles by coaster, and then four thousand two hundred more at least were to follow by sea, and there were neither railroad nor telegraphs as yet in that remote land.

Every mile of that long voyage would be traversed by Clarice long before me, and I recalled with jealous bitterness and irritation the hints that Bonteine had given of the " manifold opportunities " afforded by a long voyage for tenderness and lover-like attention.

My homeward march with the little band of invalid soldiers was but the beginning of an end that I could not foresee. I strove to be patient, to be resigned, and to persevere. We had escaped with our lives from the hands of the Caffres, and there was yet hope.

Two days' march brought us to Burghersdorp, a little town with a thatched Dutch church, where we procured a store of cheroots and lucifer matches, and pots of cold cream, wherewith to anoint our sun-blistered cheeks and noses. A sand-storm compelled us to make a long halt in Fort Armstrong, a strong square tower, surrounded by a score or so of wattle-and-daub houses, which had been heavily shelled, and stormed by General Somerset at an early period of the war, when garrisoned by the rebel Kat River Hottentots, who had been wont to sally forth to plunder the country.

Down through the provinces of Colesberg, Cradock, and Somerset we made our march—a long and most toilsome one it proved, for many of the poor invalid soldiers died, and were buried by the wayside—till we came in sight of the South Indian Sea and the Bay of Algoa.

As we marched into the town of Port Elizabeth, its dull-

looking streets and dreary background of bare hills were not without a certain nameless charm to me, for I remembered that the eyes of Clarice Haywood must have rested on them, though she was in the society of others, who then, as now, would enjoy and feel all the influence of the fascination that pervaded her whole being, and all she said and did.

In the bay, H.M.'s sloop *Active* was lying with her steam getting up. A signal was made from the harbour, and no time was lost in transferring us on board of her. No difficulty was made about a passage for me to Cape Town, as I had served as a volunteer with the 74th Highlanders, the remains of whose officer's dress I still wore.

Astride the naked shoulders of some athletic Fingoes we were placed in the boats of the ship, which soon conveyed us on board of her. My luggage consisted of Jan Cupido's double-barrelled rifle, which I hoped yet to hang in Haddonrig, as a souvenir of perilous times.

There were a few preliminaries to adjust, and the *Active* steamed out of Algoa Bay. On the morning of the third day I beheld that which I had not seen for five years, the great Table Mountain, over which a snow-white mist was floating.

Running in from Table Bay we came to anchor. I soon bade adieu to the *Active*, and was ashore in Cape Town, at my bankers' for funds, at the tailor's for an outfit, and at the harbour in search of a ship bound for Jamaica. My bankers had long since thought me numbered with the dead, and were about to advertise for my heirs or representatives in the London and Edinburgh newspapers.

I soon discovered the agent of the *Eugenie*, and I begged that he would favour me with a list of her passengers. It was duly shown me, and I read the names of "Captain and Mrs. Gerard Douglas, Miss Haywood, Lieutenant Percival Graves, Mynheer S. van Neukerque, Mr. John Smith," &c.

"I—can you tell me the Christian name of this person, Van Neukerque?" I inquired of the clerk who showed me the ledger, and I felt while doing so that I was somewhat blank in visage, and sorely perplexed in heart.

"No, sir."

"But, why?"

"Simply, sir, because I don't think he gave it."

"It was surely not Schalk?"

"I cannot say, sir, never having heard it," replied the clerk.

"Had he any friends in Cape Town?"

"None; I believe he was a total stranger."

"Did you see him?" I asked anxiously.

"Yes, sir; twice. First when he came here, accompanied by Miss Haywood and Captain Douglas, to secure his berth, and secondly, when he came to pay for it, before the sailing of the *Eugenie*."

The incidental conjunction of his name and that of Clarice made me wince.

"Pardon me troubling you with so many questions; but what manner of man was he—handsome, eh?"

"No, sir; far, perhaps, from handsome; but he was a very remarkable-looking man."

"Describe him, please. I feel particularly interested in this Mynheer van Neukerque, having once had a—friend of the same name."

"He was a pale and colourless man, with quick restless eyes, and very red lips. He possessed a very insinuating manner. He seldom smiled, however, and when he did so one was always struck by the whiteness and apparent sharpness of his teeth."

"That will do, thank you."

"Do you recognize your friend by this description?"

"Rather too plainly," said I, and left the somewhat perplexed official.

I hurried into the sunshine, and wandered about as one would do in a dream. I could not collect my thoughts, which were now of the most alarming nature. Could this man, this creature, whose story and whose nature were so monstrous as to be incredible, have come back from the valley of the shadows to cross my path again? Or was this fellow passenger of Clarice—this admirer, too, as I have been told—but one who bore the same name?

If this man resembled his appalling namesake, Clarice was safe from him as a lover ; and Graves was the person, I knew, from whose presence and attentions there was most to fear.

After a delay that proved sickening to one of my impatient temperament, I at last secured a cabin passage on board the ship *Wanderer*, bound for Jamaica. We sailed from Table Bay on the last day of the month of December. I remember the moon, low, round, and large apparently as a wheel, rose slowly upward to light the sea with her crimson radiance. On that same moon, in another latitude, the dark eyes of Clarice might then be sadly gazing, while she thought of me as I thought of her ; and prayerfully and hopefully I whispered to myself :

“ Shall I win her, and yet wear her in my heart.”

## CHAPTER XLII.

WE had not been a day at sea before I discovered a kind of old friend in Captain Walmer ; for though we had never met before we had often heard of each other, as he proved to be a native of Colchester, where I had twice been quartered ; and, moreover, he was the elder brother of Isabella Walmer, a girl concerning whom Douglas had quizzed me more than once, the friend, gossip, and correspondent of Clarice and Fanny Haywood, both of whom he had seen when visiting Walcot, and knew well. Thus, we had several topics to discuss in common, when pacing to and fro on the quarter-deck by day, or lingering over cigars and a glass of brandy and water at night before turning in.

John Walmer was a round-headed, curly-haired goodhumoured-looking fellow, about thirty-five years of age, and stood five feet eight in his shoes. He had clear blue eyes, a fine set of teeth, possessed rather handsome features, and voluminous brown whiskers. During twenty of his thirty-five years he had seen nearly every sea and shore in the four quarters of the globe, and had been shipwrecked and cast away some four or five times, and had abundance of anecdotes and stories to tell, and as he was well educated, he told them remarkably well.

His conversation was lively, amusing, and by no means overloaded with nautical jargon, like that of conventional seamen, such as William in *Black-eyed Susan*.

Captain Walmer had three mates, the chief of whom, Mr. Bill Hawsewood, was somewhat of a character in his way. He was the captain's senior in years, and a rough-spun tar, rather of the old school, before "wooden walls" went out of fashion and iron ones came in, and in addition to the other members of the crew we had Joe Mullins, the boatswain, and Derrick, the carpenter.

Mr. Bill Hawsewood, perceiving that I was very bronzed in visage, and that my hands, long strangers to gloves, were browned by the hot African sun, was pleased to compliment me in his own fashion.

"I like you, Captain 'Addon; you're a purpose-like fellow, if one may so speak of a gentleman. You looks like one as has had his fingers dipped in the tar bucket, and knows how to serve a rope without being ashamed of it."

For many days and nights our voyage was pleasant and prosperous, and the weather fair and fine, with nothing to vary the intense monotony of those days and starry nights—the sameness of the scene, where the blue sky met the blue sea around us—save the petrel tripping along, the occasional appearance of a gliding shark, or a whale upheaving its vast brown bulk, to remind us of Sindbad's floating isle, painting the ship or bending new canvas on her, a passing sail, too often hull down—*i.e.*, below the horizon—or a piece of driftwood floating past, suggesting unpleasant ideas of shipwreck.

But still the good ship *Wanderer* sped on, until one day, after a run of seventeen hundred miles or so, we were becalmed within some thirty leagues of the island of Ascension. The wind had completely failed us, and the *Wanderer* lay upon the waveless sea like a log in a dead calm. Not a sail was in sight, and all around the eye could scarcely tell where sky and ocean met. Both were of the same pale and almost colourless hue, the result of fierce heat and white haze, for the sun was blazing hot overhead and the pitch was oozing

out of the planks even beneath the awning of canvas which Walmer for our comfort aft had rigged over the quarter-deck.

In vain we whistled for the lagging wind, and cast little bits of charred wood overboard to discover which way the stream went, for it simply rose upward and melted away. Aloft the dogvane hung pendant and motionless, while blocks and cordage and brailed up canvas flapped heavily, and at times with a sound like thunder, on the stilly air, as the great ship rolled to and fro on the long, slow, and huge upheavals of the glassy sea.

On each of these occasions the loose rigging would form bends and the canvas be puffed out as if a coming breeze had caught them, and flap, as I have said, with a terrible thud on the spars again.

Dreamily, and lost in thought, I was leaning over the star-board quarter, gazing listlessly at each successive heave that rolled glittering past the counter, and wondering by what mysterious agency the water rose and fell thus without wind, and where the distant storm had been of which this submarine commotion was the result, when suddenly I heard the voice of Walmer shouting :

"Lower the port quarter-boat, Mr. Hawsewood. Clear the fall-tackle and out with fenders—handsomely, now—and shove off, for these rollers are heavy enough to swamp her under the counter."

"Ay, ay, sir ; all right. I'll soon overhaul it for you," replied Hawsewood.

"To pass it would never do. Their turn to-day may be ours to-morrow."

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"Not much ; only a message from the sea."

"In what form?"

"A pleasant enough form when one sees it on the table, full of fine old crusted port, or pale, dry dinner sherry."

"I don't understand," said I, a little pettishly.

"Do you see what is floating yonder?"

"Where?"



"To starboard."

"Yes."

And there, about forty yards from the ship, a common black quart bottle was visible, floating steadily on the glassy sea, and not bobbing up and down as a corked bottle usually does when the waves are in motion.

Very little will rouse curiosity and cause excitement on board of a ship during the monotony of a long tropical voyage.

The sailmaker, who was busy with needle and thread on a new set of studding sails; black Jumbo, who was half melted in his galley while preparing the day's junk and pea-soup, the watch below, who lay dozing in their bunks; the cabin boy, who was laying the table, and all hands came tumbling up to line the vessel's side, while Bill Hawsewood, with one seaman, pulled off in one of the quarter-boats, and soon brought the bottle on board.

It proved to be a common quart bottle, evidently of English make, and it was formally taken down to the cabin by Captain Walmer. It was found to be firmly corked, and to have a little piece of paper, evidently damp, lying at the bottom of it.

"Bad news of some poor craft upon the sea, or perhaps under it by this time," said Walmer, as the cabin boy brought a cork-screw, and Hawsewood, Joe Rudyard, the second mate, Mullins, the boatswain, and I drew near, and we could see the brown faces of several of the crew, full of expectation and curiosity, bent over the open skylight.

The piece of damp paper was extracted, carefully smoothed out, and was read thus:—

"Ship *Eugenie*, from Cape Town to Jamaica, foundered in south latitude 7 deg. 55 min. 56 sec., west longitude 14 deg. 23 min. 50 sec. Every boat destroyed, and all the crew and passengers lost, save one woman and ten men who are now on a raft, and hourly expecting it to go to pieces. God help us!"

"The *Eugenie* from Cape Town!" I exclaimed, in a voice so full of grief and terror as to be quite unlike my own.

"Heavens—good heavens!" cried honest Jack Walmer as he rushed to the locker, and gave me a glass of brandy

"Why, 'tis the very craft in which Miss Haywood and her friends sailed."

"She must have gone down somewhere hereabouts," added Hawsewood, quite calmly.

Again and again, with dim eyes, and a heart wrung by the most terrible emotions, I read that little scrap of damp paper, so hastily pencilled under circumstances so appalling, till every word of it seemed to be burned into my brain in letters of fire.

The handwriting seemed somehow to be familiar to me; but whose it was I could not determine. However, it was not that of Clarice.

"Come, come, my good friend," said Walmer, clapping me kindly on the back, "take heart of grace. They may have been picked up by some passing craft."

"They—who?" I asked vacantly.

"Those survivors on the raft."

"It was hourly expected to go to pieces."

"But it may not have gone to pieces after all."

"The latitude and west longitude given on that ere slip o' paper are nearly the bearings of the island of Ascension," said Hawsewood, who, after running his eye over a chart, was recording the message word for word, carefully and methodically, in his log-book.

"You are quite right, Bill," said Walmer approvingly, "and at Ascension we may hear something about them."

"Do you think so, Walmer?" I asked, looking at him helplessly and hopelessly, while my tongue became parched, and I felt that my face was white and pallid.

"There is always a chance."

The woman on the raft—who was she? Was she my own Clarice or her sister Fanny, a servant or another lady passenger? And was Douglas one of the ten unfortunate men?

These surmises flashed like lightning on my mind.

After glancing at the chart—

"She must have gone down just near where we are now," said Mullins, "some eighty miles or so off Ascension; and a

tough gale she must have encountered, sir, for she was one of the best craft as ever was slipped off the dog-shores at Blackwall, was that ere Eugenie."

"Eighty miles—and on a raft," said Hawsewood thoughtfully. "The Lord only knows what those poor folks may have endured."

"And how they may have fared," added Mullins; "eating one another without salt, mayhap."

"I've known o' such things," said Bill Hawsewood.

"Stop, Bill," said Walmer peremptorily.

But Bill was too full of his morbid subject, and would not be stopped.

"I *have* known o' such things being done in my time," said he, pushing his straw hat back to enable him to scratch his brown, curly poll with greater facility. "When I was a bit of a cabin boy on board the Jackal, of Yarmouth, and when within three days of Porto Piu, in the island of Fayal, we fell in with a water-logged ship in a heavy gale of wind, when there was such a sea running as no boat could live in, so we never thought of lowering one. We laid the main course a trifle to the mast, though it was close reefed, and passed her slowly. She was evidently timber laden, half dismasted, and could never sink. A living woman, half dead to all appearance, was lashed aloft in the mizentop, to keep her out of the waves that were surging like mad over the deck, which was flush with the sea; and in the main shrouds there was the body of a dead man, lashed by the wrists, and on him, s'help me bob, the survivors had been supporting what the doctor called 'exhausted nature.' We could assist them in no way, even at the risk of the ship and of our lives, so we were obliged to fill the yard again, and bear away into the mist and the coming night; but the wailing cry of despair as them poor souls gave over the sea when they saw us leave them went straight to the heart of every man on board the Jackal."

Fearing the rehearsal of some more such anecdotes, I went on deck; and Walmer, who was a kind and goodnatured fellow, clambered aloft with his most powerful glass: He

scanned the smooth and oily expanse of ocean in every direction, but no trace of plank or raft, or of any floating thing, could anywhere be seen.

I pictured to myself alternately Clarice and Fanny—in the selfishness of love I must admit that it was chiefly of the former I thought—enduring all the horrors of a protracted death upon an open raft, half submerged in the sea, the unsheltered glare of the fierce tropical sun by day, the gloom and chill and greater terrors of the night—hunger, thirst, despair, and madness—all that I had ever read of in romance and reality came floating fast upon my memory now.

They might have had some food—some water, too. If so, how long would they last?

Would they be kind to her, or would brutal, sordid selfishness prevail? Doubtless they would do all that Christians might do to alleviate her terrible sufferings. She was a woman, and ever gentle and soft in her nature. Oh, too tender for a fate so terrible.

And that ubiquitous and mysterious Mynheer S. van Neukerque—was he, too, on the raft, one of the ten? He who, for all I knew, might be similar in nature to that terrible being, in whose strange nature poor Bruine Kasteel had almost taught me to believe, and who, I knew, had abstracted the dead body of Gertrude van Bommel.

The whole episode of the bottle was like a hideous dream, which I could not have realised but for the presence and tangible existence of the piece of pencilled paper—that terrible and solemn message of the dying from the sea.

Every day we read of such messages in the newspapers. They are picked up in bay and creek, on the high seas, as this one was, or by the loiterers among the shingles and the shell-gatherers by the shore; but to how few hearts do they come so terribly home as this one came to me.

As I looked upon the ocean with grief and loathing it seemed to me but as a grave—a vast grave now to me—the grave of all my hopes and desires.

“‘Oh, treacherous sea!’” thought I, quoting the words of

another, “‘you can smile and smile, and break into ten thousand smiles, and make such dainty music on the pebbly shore, who can believe how cruel your wrath can be that has not seen you tear man’s floating house to fragments, and whelm him with his dear ones in your gaping depths?’”

And thus by the treacherous sea had the floating home of Clarice been torn, and my poor heart too.

Yet, as the drowning will cling to straws, I remembered the words of Walmer, and hoping against hope, believed that at Ascension, where he meant to touch, we might hear some tidings of the lost ship, or of the raft, with the survivors of her passengers and crew.

### CHAPTER XLIII.

NEXT morning I was roused from my sleepless couch by the cheerful voice of Walmer hailing me down the companion way.

“Come on deck, Captain Haddon. Ascension is now in sight, and bears about twelve miles north on the lee bow!”

“A little time and I may know all—the best or the worst. Death itself is better than the bitterness and horror of such suspense as this,” thought I, as I sprang from the pillow on which I had not closed an eye during the long, long, weary night that had at last passed away.

The sky was calm, the sea smooth, the morning beautiful, and we were running before a fine breeze under a heavy press of canvas.

Not a sail was in sight; but the long, smoky pennant of some great ocean steamer, as yet unseen, though the sound of her engines could be heard for miles across the sea, rose at the horizon far, far away.

And there upon our lee bow towered Ascension, the island of present hopes and fears.

After a long voyage, any land is a source of deep interest, whether it be one’s native shore, or one on which our eyes have never rested; but this solitary island in the South Atlantic inspired a deep and terrible concern in me.

"Patience—patience!" I kept repeating. "A little time, and I may know all."

"Few lives, even the most prosaic, are without some romance," said Walmer, who overheard me; "and this is a bit of yours."

"True," replied I; "but sorrowful—too sorrowful to be endured with patience. What a strange coincidence that our ship should pick up the message that mentioned the loss of hers."

"Yes; but stranger things than that happen in the course of a seafaring life."

Fast rose the volcanic isle from the sea as the Wanderer flew on under a cloud of sail. With many a balsatic peak, all portions, however, of one black and bleak conical mountain—the same on whose summit the pious and adventurous Portuguese, Juan de Novo, erected a stone cross when he discovered the island on Ascension Day in 1501—the sterile place is so bare that only the vegetable productions, one of which is grass, exist in all its sixty miles of rock and sand. It is now the rendezvous of our African squadron; but in times long past the early voyagers were wont to deposit their letters in a crevice of the rocks, still known as the sailor's post-office.

There, in a well-corked bottle, the crews left their tender messages to sweethearts and friends, and they were taken to their destination by the crew of the next ship that passed in a contrary direction, and of many a brave heart and of many a stout ship that never have been heard of more was the last news found in that primitive letter-box in the then lonely Isle of Ascension.

In that bleak place a little British settlement has sprung up, and our flag was flying on the pigmy fort that was built when the great Emperor was pining a captive on that other lonely islet of the Southern Sea—the rock of St. Helena.

We ran along the coast of the island, which is about ten miles long. The wind changed a little as we got under its lee; but Walmer worked his ship into the Bay of Ascension,

and then, shortening sail, hove to, and ordered a boat to be lowered instantly.

I was the second man who sprang into her, and with six hands Walmer and I were pulled ashore. Of the harbour master—if the old man in charge of the little port and pier may be so named—we made every inquiry as to whether any one on the island had heard aught of the wreck of the *Eugenie*, or of her raft.

But he and all who gathered round us shook their heads. Some months before a ship so named had touched at Ascension on her way to the Leeward Isles or Jamaica, none knew exactly which ; but all had prospered well with her and her crew to that time.

If she had foundered it must have been soon after leaving Ascension, “as heavy gales of wind had occurred about that time, and in one of them Her Majesty’s ship *Hairyadney*”—for so he named it—“had all her masts swept by the board like baccy pipes.”

With this meagre and rather alarming information I was forced to be contented, and Walmer, after getting five fine turtles, a goat, and some spirits for our use in the cabin, shoved off for the ship. We soon after bore up, making all possible sail, and in six hours Ascension was as many leagues astern.

On arriving in Jamaica now rested the last vestige of hope in my aching heart. I could but visit the merchants or brokers to whom she was consigned, and hear from them a final corroboration of that terrible message from the sea.

“If the underwriters have paid up,” said Walmer, “we may be certain that it is all dickey with the poor *Eugenie*, and Davy Jones alone could tell her story.”

Oh, how dear seems that which we have lost, or are about to lose for ever ! Can it be that true love only becomes lasting after separation or death ? The wind was favourable, and for weeks our voyage was most prosperous. In due time, in our north-western course, we sighted Cape San Roque, a headland of Brazil, and ran along the coast of South America, when a terrible catastrophe overtook us on the sea.

The night was beautiful. The ship was lying her course under easy sail, and I was walking on the weather side of the quarter-deck alone, and occupied only with my own thoughts and the fag end of a cheroot before going below to seek my restless couch. There was something sadly soothing in the calm aspect of the midnight sea, and in the rippling sound of its waters as the ship glided through them, in the solemn hum of the wind through the rigging aloft, and in the appearance of and whiteness of her vast cloud of canvas, for though there was no moon the sail seemed white as snow against the deep blue of the starlit sky.

Yet the skies of those southern climes are less studded with stars than those of our own northern hemisphere. For south of the equator are great spaces without a single twinkler, and these dark and unlighted portions of blue vacuity give a wonderful brightness to such constellations as the Southern Cross—one so wonderful in its beauty, and so impressive in its aspect, that more than once I saw a devout Spanish seaman on board the *Wanderer*, a Catholic, on his knees in a dark corner of the ship, lest his English messmates should mock him, at his prayers, with his black and shining eyes fixed earnestly upon it, as the emblem of his faith glittering in its glory amid the blue dome of heaven.

Suddenly I was roused from my own thoughts by that cry which everywhere fills the heart with alarm ; but nowhere is it so fatal in its significance as at sea.

“Fire!—fire in the forehold! Fire! fire!”

The whole crew were instantly on deck, and certainly smoke was seen to be issuing from under the iron bands, the wooden covering, and the canvas tarpaulin of the fore hatchway.

“Off with the hatch—men, work with a will! Be cool and steady, rig the hose, and stand by with the fire buckets!” cried Walmer.

The latter were instantly brought from their place at the break of the poop, the hatch was taken off, and then that most terrible sight at sea, flames were seen shooting up the fore hatchway. Some cases of petroleum had broken loose, and



the whole forepart of the ship was speedily a mass of irrepressible fire.

The sharp hiss of a few buckets of water, which were almost evaporated in their descent amid the scorching heat, showed how unavailing would be our efforts to save the ship, the whole cargo being of the most inflammable description.

The roaring of the flames, as they ran in circles round the well-greased mast, along the tarry forestay, and set fire to the foresail, forestaysail, and jib, was appalling, and the noise and confusion consequent on so sudden and terrible a catastrophe were so great, that Captain Walmer had to provide himself with his speaking trumpet to make the now bewildered crew obey him.

By the rapidity with which the conflagration spread, the crew were separated into two portions—the greater part were amidships ; but seven or eight were compelled to take refuge far ahead, upon the bowsprit, and even the flying jibboom.

"Let her drive before the wind, square the mainyard," cried Walmer, "and so let her go till we have the boats clear and ready for lowering. Bring up the charts, the log-book, and my chronometer. Mr. Hawsewood, put a beaker of water and a bag of biscuits into each boat, and stand by with a gang to lower away. Keep quiet, men, for the sake of your lives. We must save them, if we cannot save the ship."

That which added to the terror of the seamen was the knowledge that we had gun-powder on board, and we knew not the moment the flames might reach it and send us to eternity. Thus the clamour grew great, and confusion greater, several men all shouting at once.

"Remember the powder—remember the powder!"

"It is aft the mainmast!" cried one.

"Scuttle the water tank," suggested another."

"Stand by, men, to lower the boats," commanded Hawsewood, who with great promptitude had fulfilled the captain's orders, and put into three of the boats compasses, bread, and water—a duty in which I assisted him.

"Where is Mr. Rudyard, the second mate?" asked Walmer, suddenly recollecting him.

"Ill in the forecastle bunks," replied a voice.

"Is he not one of those astride the bowsprit?"

"No, sir," replied Mullins, the boatswain.

"Can we get him out?"

"Impossible, sir; fire is all about—the flames have cut him completely off.

"Then heaven help the poor fellow!" exclaimed Walmer.

At that moment we heard a shriek, and the second mate, in his night-dress, was seen to make a dart from the forecastle hatch, and passing almost through the flames, to leap headlong into the sea over the bows, and we never saw him again.

The fall of the foremast with a dreadful crash, when the shrouds and the forestay were scorched through, and the consequent descent of the maintopmast, with all its gear and hammer, yards and sails, reduced the vessel in a moment to a complete wreck, and the clouds of loose canvass that enveloped the deck—actually imprisoning some of the crew, as they caught fire fast and furiously—compelled us to lose no time in quitting the fatal ship.

She had four boats, but, unhappily, two of these were swamped and filled with water alongside by the unequal and hurried manner in which the fall-tackles were let go, and a third was dashed to pieces by the descent of the maintopsail yard, which disabled or killed outright—we never knew which—four of our men.

Mullins, the boatswain, the black cook—who was shouting all the while, "Jumbo, oh, Jumbo!"—the Obeah man of the Negroes—with Walmer and myself, contrived to get the fourth, and now only serviceable, boat successfully lowered. She had all her oars secured to the thwarts by a lashing, which we cut.

We then shoved off on the port side to get clear of the ship, and pick up such of the crew as might jump overboard.

The fire had not yet reached the cabin, or store-room; but by the fall of the rigging, and especially of the set sails, all of which were soon in flames, we had no chance of getting provisions for this boat, which was the only one poor Hawsewood had not

We pulled round under the bows, and picked four men off the bowsprit easily enough, as they slid down by the dangling ends of some half-burned ropes.

The scene was now grand and awful. The entire ship was one mass of roaring flame. It shot out at the windows astern, at the ballast ports ahead, and lit up the little circular ports of the cabin berths; and now the danger of the exploding powder compelled us to pull some distance, so that we could not, but at the risk of our lives, return to take off four of the crew—one of these was Hawsewood—whom we saw hanging on by the lower irons of the mizen chain plates, and to whom we hallooed in vain to drop into the sea and strike out towards us.

Perhaps the poor fellows were not swimmers, or were too paralysed by fear to understand us, and they would have continued to hold on there, half submerged in the sea, till the chain plates grew too hot for their grasp, or till the showers of falling sparks choked them; but suddenly there was a terrific and roaring crash, as the powder in the hold exploded.

A vast and conical pyramid of red fire and glittering sparks ascended high into the air, to arch over and then to fall, as if from the zenith, in a hissing shower upon the sea, and then for a time all became comparative darkness; but for a time only, as the flames gathered new strength, fore, aft, and amidships, and then some fifty tons of saltpetre which she had on board continued to burn steadily, casting a blue and ghastly glare for thirty miles or more upon the sea, and pale and most sepulchral looked our blanched and saddened faces in that cold and chilly light, which made everything so luridly horrible, tipping, as if with phosphorus, the summit of every wave that rose, and showing us many strange and mysterious things that seemed to glide in the depths below us.

We were not without hope that this vast light might be seen from some passing ship, and bring her down to our succour; but when day broke fairly, and the poor old Wanderer, after burning to the water's edge, went suddenly down with a sound that passed over the water like a sigh, an exclamation escaped

us all, for as the grey daylight stole over the sea with its tropical rapidity, and replaced the ghastly glare on which we had looked so long with haggard eyes, we now swept the far horizon.

Not a sail was in sight, and there we were on the wide and open sea, eight of us in all, cramped in a small boat, with a compass to steer by certainly, but without a sail to hoist, a biscuit to eat, or a drop of water to allay the thirst that, after so many hours of keen excitement, of heat and exertion, was already beginning to be sensibly felt by us all.

For myself I may say that a dogged indifference to life and death alike possessed me now.

I might die, and never learn the fate of Clarice Haywood. She might survive, the solitary woman on the raft, and never know of mine till we met in that place where there would be no parting, and where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage.

#### CHAPTER XLIV.

How often had I said mentally, "Oh, anything—anything to kill the dull, the stupid, and the weary time till we shall meet again;" and now I had that "anything" with a vengeance.

"By the last observation poor Bill Hawsewood and I made together, we should now be not many miles from the island of Tobago, and the Spanish Main should lie there," said Walmer, pointing to the westward.

"And how should Tobago bear, sir?" asked a seaman.

"Nor'-west," said Walmer, glancing at the compass, which was now lashed by three or four of our neckties to the stern thwart in front of him, for he now held the yoke lines and was steering. "Bend to your oars, my friends," said he, after a pause. "Thank heaven, we have the prospect of a fine day before us, at all events, when there might be a tough gale, and how would we fare then? So pull steadily, quietly, and with a will, for our lives depend upon our fortitude and exertions now."

In all his tropical splendour, the morning sun rose, amid

clouds of crimson and amber, from the calm and lovely sea ; but the hearts of all in that tiny boat—that mere speck which floated in its loneliness upon the vast expanse of water—were oppressed by sad, and perhaps terrible thoughts, save perhaps myself, for with me it seemed as if the light had departed from my existence on the day we found that fatal message from the sea, and that nothing in this world could ever illuminate it again.

“How far, sir, do you think Tobago may bear?” asked Mullins, breaking a long silence.

“Some eighty miles or so from where the ship went down,” replied Walmer, and again we relapsed into silence that was broken only by the hard breathing of the rowers, the strain of the boat’s timbers, and the monotonous wooden clank of the oars between the tholling pins, as she was urged by four of us at a time on her watery and somewhat uncertain path.

Twice during that day we were tantalized by sounds that came across the water from the ships that were by us unseen.

The sun was verging westward now, and we felt more lonely than ever on the sea, more helpless and abandoned to fate. Our thirst was excessive after a day of heat and toil at the oars, in an atmosphere so saline, and baleful though the night dew might prove, we were not without hope it would moisten our parched lips.

All night we alternately dozed, or took our spell at the oars in succession, and once more morning dawned upon a lonely and glassy sea, where not a sail was in sight ; and now the thirst we had already begun to endure on that night of excitement when the ship was destroyed, was becoming maddening.

Our lips were baked and cracked, our throats and tongues sore and dry, our eyes bloodshot, and most of us were without other protection for our heads from the fierce rays of the sun than the sleeves of our shirts, torn off and twisted round them in turban fashion.

Though my constitution was a hardy one, and my bodily sufferings were becoming great, yet I gathered strange and

gloomy satisfaction from the conviction that I endured them for Clarice, or in my pursuit of her; and yet, unless in heaven, Clarice might never know them. And times there were when I thought how strange would be the coincidence if we were both to perish there, and find our graves at the bottom of the same sea.

On this day the heat was excessive, and our consequent thirst intolerable, and we had the most tantalising memories of refreshing draughts of bitter beer and Dublin stout, of springs, and streams, and pools of sparkling water. Our hunger was altogether a secondary sensation or craving to this of thirst.

About midday the wind began to blow, and, to add to our misery, it rapidly increased to more than half a gale. The boat was filled twice with water as the sea broke over her, and we were so weak now, as to be only able to bale her partially. By the sea on these two occasions all our oars were carried away—torn, save one, from our feeble hands; and so all we could do now was to let her float or drive before the waves and wind, the helpless sport of both.

Night came on us again without hope, and a Scottish seaman from Gourrock began to manifest symptoms of madness, for

He, poor fellow, had a wife and children—  
Two things for dying people quite bewildering.

He began to tear his hair and rave of his "dear gudewife and bonnie bairns." Ere long he began to imagine they were beside him, that one pet child—"wee Elsie"—was seated on his knee. He played in fancy with her golden hair, and addressed the most endearing epithets to all.

Suddenly this vision of home and happiness, of his own fireside, seemed to pass from him, and a gleam of sense, or some new phase of madness, came on him, and he found himself, as before, tossing on the dark and midnight sea, with his gaunt and haggard companions. A yell of despair escaped him, and springing overboard into the water, before a

hand could be raised to save or interrupt him, he vanished for ever.

We gazed blankly into each other's hollow and stony eyes, for it seemed as if he had but anticipated the doom that awaited us all.

So the night passed, and as we had no means of rowing, we continued, weakly and wearily, to bale the boat with a small wooden vessel used for the purpose, and earnestly we prayed for rain—rain even in torrents; but we had only the salt, bitter spoon-drift of the sea, torn by the wind from the white crests of the waves, and swept over us ever and anon.

Walmer repeated very earnestly and piously certain verses from Isaiah, which seemed to apply to our situation, and as gray dawn stole over the sea, and though the wind and waves went down together, our hands and feet were cold, benumbed and swollen, so that our condition gradually became terrible and piteous indeed.

"Sail O!" suddenly cried Joe Mullins, the boatswain, in a voice that is indescribable. "Oh, heaven be thanked—heaven be thanked! Sail O!" he cried again, and the strong man burst into tears.

"Where away, Joe, my lad?" asked Walmer.

"Just on the star-board bow, sir."

Eagerly—yea, with all the anxiety that men in the jaws of death can only feel—we turned in the direction indicated, while fearing in our hearts that it might be an optical delusion with Mullins, the result of suffering, despair, and a heated imagination; but there, bearing right towards us, out of a gray and hazy bank of morning mist, was a large craft, a full-rigged ship, with her courses, topsails, and topgallant-sails set.

She was about four miles off, but she loomed large and close to the eye, for all her canvas shone in the red light of the rising sun as she came on like a tall spectre gliding noiselessly out of the vapour.

On, and on, and on she came, sailing at the rate of ten knots an hour at least, yet not too fast for us. Joy and hope

lent us a power we did not think we possessed, for when she was sufficiently near we raised a united shout with all our voices and all our strength. The wind seemed to bear it away from her, and the watch on deck never heard it; but that we were seen we could not doubt, for now, by the cheerful light of the beautiful morning, we saw, on the poop and main deck, men hurrying to and fro, telescopes levelled and hands pointed at us, preparations made for launching a boat, the davits swung clear of the quarter, and the fall-tackles cleared; and once more our hurrah, however faint—the hurrah that comes readiest and best to a Briton's tongue—rang over the water, as we saw the mainyard thrown aback and her topsails shivering, when we were not more than twenty yards from her, and tossing up and down like a cork on the heaving sea.

She was a merchant ship of beautiful build. Her figure-head was a Black Friar, or Franciscan, with bald pate, cowl, robe, and beads. She was straight as a lance in her plank-sheer, and her sharp bows, sheathed to the bends in new and glittering copper, towered up above us, lined by a row of dark and foreign-looking faces.

"Hola, barqueta! De donde viene vin?" (*i. e.* "Boat ahoy! Where do you come from?") hailed a man, in Spanish.

"We have been cast away at sea," replied Captain Walmer.

"Inglesos?"

"Si, senor," cried I.

"Sabe vin el Castellano?"

"Lo entiendo un poco," I replied.

I could speak a little Spanish, but *poco* indeed.

"A little! Bueno—that is well. Lay your boat alongside if you can, and we shall soon have you on board."

In our wretched and enfeebled condition, and with only one oar, we could not lay the boat alongside, so the Spaniards lowered one from the quarter with considerable celerity, and ere long we were all on board the ship, and stowed away in beds in the forecastle bunks—beds that, if not over clean, as the crew was Spanish, were comfortable and easy after the



misery and horror we had endured so long. Hot coffee and brandy were supplied to us ; but so that we were rescued, so little did we care by whom, or for whither bound, that it was not until the noon of the next day that any of us made inquiries about these matters, and then, in reply to some questions of Walmer's, we learned from a Spanish mate that we had been picked up by the Santo Domingo, a six hundred ton ship of Cadiz, from Rio de la Plata, bound to Puerto Rico, José Casanova master.

The crew were all black-haired, black-whiskered, sallow, and picturesque-looking fellows—some of them being half-breeds from the Spanish Main.

Senor José Casanova was a good specimen of his class, a polite and well-bred old Spanish seaman, who had once held a commission in the royal navy of Spain, but had been dismissed by a court-martial at Cuba for shooting a superior officer in a duel about a girl in the island of Tortuga ; and now, on learning from Joe Mullins, who was the first of us that was able to crawl on deck, that Walmer was the captain of the lost ship, and that I had borne a commission under Her Majesty the Queen, and been "un oficiale Britanica," he had us conveyed aft and placed in his own cabin, where we were treated with every attention and courtesy.

When he rescued us he had still six hundred miles to run before reaching his destination, Puerto Rico, and I consoled myself by remembering that this island did not lie far out of the original course I was pursuing to Jamaica, and meant still to pursue—but for what purpose now ?

For many, many hours after we were rescued, the rain, for which we had prayed so earnestly in the boat, fell in such torrents that had we been still in it our fate would soon have been sealed. All duty was conducted silently and noiselessly, and with true Spanish taciturnity, while this discomfort continued, and there I lay below, lulled by the monotonous rush of the tropical rain, dreaming of the past—of the wild work I had seen among the Caffres—and there were times when I seemed to hear amid the wind as it hummed through the

rigging the bagpipes of the 74th Highlanders. Another sound, but a gentle and a soft one—the voice of one who was dear to me—came at times to my drowsy ear, stirring the chords of agony in my heart ; and so I lay for two days and nights, helpless, in my little cabin, till, when the rain abated and the weather was beautiful, I made an effort and came on deck, where I found the few survivors of our crew had preceded me, and the poor fellows gathered round me with warm congratulations.

On the noon of the sixth day, Captain Casanova announced that land was in sight, and through the telescope we could see the ranges of beautiful mountains which intersect the whole island of Puerto Rico. The navigation there is perilous work among the groups of islets, rocks, and sandy keys, which lie along the eastern coast of the island ; and all that night and all next day we were working slowly through them, till the following evening saw us running freely along its northern shore, and the crew of the Santo Domingo toiling cheerfully in preparing for harbour. While labouring thus they all sang Spanish songs, at times with considerable taste, and no small degree of melody and tenderness.

The scarlet and yellow ensign of Castile and Leon was floating out from our gaff peak.

The sun was just setting on our starboard quarter, and a blaze of golden light bathed all the land and sea, when the studding sails were taken in as if by magic ; and when we were abreast of the lighthouse on the Moro, the courses were hauled up, the mainyard backed, and the light breeze swept softly through the open rigging from stem to stern.

The anchor was let go with a plunge, the sails were swiftly and neatly handed. Slowly the great ship swung round with her sharp prow to the wind, and I found myself in the harbour of Puerto Rico—a place of which I had read in boyhood as the scene of some of the exploits of the gallant English admiral Sir Francis Drake ; but where, certainly, I never expected to find myself under any circumstances whatever, most assuredly least of all as a penniless, almost aimless wanderer and castaway.

## CHAPTER XLV.

FURNISHED with a letter from Captain Casanova to the British consul, with Captain Walmer, I lost no time in seeking out that official, for we were alike without purse or wardrobe, and had to prove who we were. Money and an outfit I required imperatively, as I was burning with impatience to take the first steamer for Jamaica, and the captain, with the remnant of his crew, meant to make his way home to England.

Though there was snow on the lofty mountain peaks, the hot sun blazed down upon the unpaved streets of San Juan de Puerto Rico till the soil almost cracked; the dusty gutters were dry, and the passers to and fro were grilled and breathless. Green fans, vast straw sombreros, and ample umbrellas were all in requisition by those who could procure them.

We soon found next day the consul, a wealthy merchant, whose residence, built in the form of a square, had all the melancholy and unfurnished aspect peculiar to a warm climate, presented our letters, and were courteously received, for the consul was a well bred man of Old Castile.

Our story was soon told, and duly recorded in his books; the names of the seamen were taken down, and letters of credit were given us. The sailors departed to enjoy themselves, and talking of our future plans, Walmer and I—after being at a banker's, and also at a clothier's establishment—wandered for hours through the streets of the city, undecided as to which hotel we should honour by our residence.

At the corner of one of the streets a little lamp was flickering before a gaudy figure of the Madonna and Child. Beside it I saw a man standing, and at first I thought he was engaged in prayer; but another glance showed me that he was endeavouring to light a very refractory cigar at the flame of the lamp.

As we approached he glanced hastily and uneasily about him, fearing, perhaps, the act might be deemed rather as a sacrilege, and hurrying down a dark street he disappeared;

but at the moment of his turning round an irrepressible exclamation escaped me.

He was rather fashionably dressed, and looked more like an Englishman than a Spaniard ; but in the pale and impassible face, on which the lamplight flickered for a moment, in the cruel mouth, cold, glittering eyes, and peculiar features, I saw—or thought I saw—the mysterious wretch who fell beneath the pistol of Speke van Bommel in the far away Cape Colony.

I dashed after him, but whether he thought himself pursued, whether he had recognized me, or whether he had merely entered some house which was his destination I know not. Anyway, the man, if he existed at all, or was not some phantasm consequent to all I had undergone, had disappeared ; and when breathlessly I rejoined Jack Walmer, and told him of the affair, and why I had darted so suddenly from his side, he rallied me severely and laughingly “for yielding to such fancies.”

“But a man of the same name sailed in the *Eugenie*,” I urged.

“True ; but there may be more Van Neukerques than one in the world,” replied the practical Walmer. “How many Smiths, Browns, Joneses, and Robinsons are there?”

“But the description of his personal appearance, as given me at Cape Town, tallied exactly with that of the man I met and saw buried in the bush.”

“Impossible, my dear fellow ; it is all fancy.”

“His name, too, was the same.”

“Nay, you only know that the initial letter of his name was similar, that is all.”

“You saw the man as well as I did, quietly lighting his cheroot at the lamp.”

“Ghosts usually give up bad habits, and smoking is one. I saw him, of course, but with you the likeness was undoubtedly fancy.”

“It was no fancy,” I persisted ; “and could I but have

spoken with him he might have ended the horrible suspense and misery I endure about the loss of the Eugenie."

"Well, here is a *café*; let us overhaul the newspaper. The shipping list will show me the first craft for Liverpool."

"And for Jamaica," I added.

Entering the house, we summoned the waiter, and ordered wine, cigars, and the newspapers. Walmer lit a cigar, and taking one of the papers, ran his eye over the advertisement.

"I am sorry to say we shall soon part company, my friend," said he; "and after all we have endured together, danger and suffering in common, I shall certainly miss you; but we shall meet again, Captain Haddon, for in this work-a-day world no one ever stands still."

"You have procured what you sought—a ship?"

"Yes, for Liverpool direct. The San Francisco will touch here to-morrow morning on her way from Kingstown. The crew, or all that remain now of the poor fellows who manned the Wanderer, will go with me in her as passengers."

"And now for myself."

"Another steamer—the Hernan Cortes—bound for Port-au-Prince, Vera Cruz, and Tampico, on the Gulf of Mexico, will call here before touching at Kingston, on the twentieth of this month."

"Good. I shall have a whole week to prosecute my inquiries after him," said I thoughtfully.

"*Him!* Do you mean the ghost?"

"I mean the strange man we both saw plainly enough."

"But with different eyes," replied Walmer, laughing. "I saw one man certainly, but you thought you saw another."

I felt petulant, but remained silent for some time, while Walmer continued to read the shipping intelligence, in which he felt, of course, a professional interest.

"Now, Walmer, there's a good fellow, don't bother with that paper after you have found out all we want to know,"

said I, tipping the ashes from my cigar ; “ but listen to me. I should like to talk to you.”

“ About poor Miss Haywood, of course ; but good heavens, what is this I see here, Haddon ?”

“ About the—the Eugenie !”

“ Yes.”

“ News of her wreck, or of the raft ?” said I with a groan as I started up.

“ News of neither. But see,” and pointing with his finger he indicated the shipping intelligence from Jamaica four or five months back, wherein was announced—

*“ Entered inwards the navis marchant (i.e., merchant ship) Eugenie, with goods and passengers.”*

With eyeballs that I felt were starting in their sockets, I read over this announcement again and again.

“ Oh, Jack Walmer !” I exclaimed, in a broken voice, “ how little do we know how trivial an incident may have a great, a glorious, or a dark and terrible influence over our fortunes, and on our future. Had you not, in mere idleness probably, been glancing over this old Spanish paper, we had not seen this.”

“ True, my dear fellow ; but compose yourself. We see here, that before the date of the supposed wreck, a ship called the Eugenie has entered Kingston harbour, Jamaica ; but it may not be the Eugenie in which we are interested.”

“ Ah, don’t crush my poor hopes so soon.”

“ The notice says entered inwards ; but does not say from where.”

“ Alas ! true, Walmer, and the name is common enough in all shipping lists.”

“ There is still hope, my friend.”

“ But what about the message from the sea ?”

“ That remains yet to be seen.”

“ Yes, yes ; though brief, it was so circumstantial—so terribly circumstantial. Let me but get to Jamaica, and then I shall know all—the best or the worst. I shall have a week to

wait here, and will count every hour of it till the sailing of the Hernan Cortes."

After we had conversed for some time, and canvassed the chances *pro* and *con*, and searched over the file of the *Balanza Mercantil* for more news, till we were weary, we sat smoking in silence by the light of the wax candles.

My mind was turned completely inwards, and I heard neither the distant blare of the Spanish trumpets, nor the sweet notes of the vesper hymn ; and Walmer, thinking of his chances of a new ship when he saw once more the waters of the Mersey, sat silently watching the pale blue smoke of his cigar, till a sharp and abrupt exclamation that escaped him made me start and look up.

"What is the matter ?" I asked. "Did a mosquito sting you?"

"Did you see that?"

"What?"

"Why, the man!"

"What man?"

"The man whose appearance so startled you at the shrine some time ago?"

"No, Walmer ; I saw no one."

"Well, there at that open window, staring in full at us—at you particularly and undoubtedly—he stood a moment ago, and, by Jove ! so far as your description of a pale face, green eyes, red lips, and a general aspect of dampness and unhealthiness go, he is the very man of your weird story."

I sprang out into the verandah, but it was untenanted ; there was no one even in the street.

"Hola mozo de café !" cried I, and rang the hand-bell furiously.

The startled waiter came ; but he had seen no one. We alone were the visitors to-night. The opera-house and the Senor Gobernador's ball had apparently absorbed the attention of all idlers.

We could learn nothing more, and so, after paying our bill, we returned to the Hotel del Caballo Blanco ; and then,

after one more cigar and a glass of sherry, we separated for the night, a little sadly too, for we knew that we were to part on the morrow, and too probably for ever.

The "weed" failed to soothe me. I tossed restlessly on my pillow, feverishly awake ; and when I did sleep it proved but a species of doze, full of exciting dreams, from which I would start to think over the notice I had seen in the paper, to surmise why the strange being, Neukerque, if he really existed at all, should have been watching me.

Sometimes in my dreams I was again engaged with the Caffres—with old Sandilli himself—and to show how much a recklessness of life had grown in my heart, I never, even in the mimic and visionary combat, sought the shelter of rock or tree, but when exchanging shot for shot, stood boldly and defiantly exposed, as if courting their bullets and assegais, and consequent death.

At other times I was again on board the burning ship, or in the tiny boat with my pale companions, "rocked on the bosom of the deep," cold, shivering, and helpless, hungry, and sorely athirst ; or I saw before me the wild, dark eyes of Mariqua, sparkling with mingled love and rage, while her soft brown arms encircled me. Then she would take the appearance of Clarice Haywood, with her tender hazel orbs, and bright chestnut hair ; and times there were when her voice came to me with a vivid distinctness that filled me with a species of terror as it lingered on the tympanum of my wakened ear.

And now her voice seemed ever full of pathos and of sorrow.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

NEXT morning I bade adieu to worthy Jack Walmer, and shook hands heartily with Joe Mullins the boatswain, Der-rick the carpenter, with Jumbo the black cook, and their ship mates, and with a saddened heart and moistened eyes I watched from the pierhead the great Liverpool liner, as she



stood away out into the ocean, bearing them homeward ; and as the evening declined I felt a considerable emotion of utter loneliness come over me. Yet I was in the midst of a large, a lively, and a busy population.

I secured my passage in the Hernan Cortes, and seemed to feel that in doing so I had achieved another step towards the great end of all my present wandering.

All that evening and all the next day I rambled about the city, seeking in every probable public place the strange man I had seen—the tribunal or law courts, the Casa de Villa or town-house, the balsa or exchange, the citadel, the castle, or the morro, the beerhouses, and the most frequented thoroughfares. I sought in vain, always returning, as a *point d'appui*, to the *café* where Walmer had seen him last, or to the callejon or alley where he had disappeared.

And yet, though I knew it not, this remarkable personage was often much nearer than I had the least idea of.

As the morro is much frequented by visitors, I often sought for him there. A strong and quaint old fort it is, for it was there that, when Philip II. was King of Spain and the Indies, Clifford, the gallant Earl of Cumberland, at his own expense, leading a thousand stout English men-at-arms, stormed it, sword in hand, after a long march over "horrid rocks and cliffs," and after being nearly drowned by the weight of his armour when he fell into the sea at the capture and destruction of the causeways and drawbridges by which the city and the morro were approached.

I returned, weary and perplexed, to the Hotel del Caballo Blanco. The *table d'hôte* was numerously attended ; but he I sought was not there. The society was varied, but pleasant enough, and we idled long over our wine and cigars and the rich dessert, composed of the pincapples, guavas, black and white plums, the oranges and limes of that favoured isle, the most luxuriant of all the Antilles.

There were merchant captains from all parts of the world, noisy and talkative, Spanish officers from the citadel, grave and taciturn, but gentlemanly and courteous, planters in

town on business at the balsa from all parts of the island, and there were all shades of complexion, from the fair-cheeked and auburn-haired English seaman to the darkest copper colour; but none were absolutely black save the waiters, who were clad in spotless white jackets and trousers.

On this evening, wearied with the heat and fruitless wandering during the past day, I retired early to my room, which was lofty, airy, and spacious, and had a tall, folding French case-ment that opened towards the principal street of the city. It was on the second *étage*, and I remember a strange emotion came over me as I entered it—an emotion of a nature most difficult to analyse, and almost impossible to describe otherwise than as an intense curiosity to know who the person was, or the persons were, that occupied the adjoining room. The partition was so thin that I could hear them moving about, and even conversing in low tones.

Mere curiosity I might soon have gratified by consulting with the nearest waiter, and slipping a dollar into his hand; but it seemed to be a species of animal magnetism—the mysterious prescience of the presence and emotion of one spirit with another—that possessed me, and when the reader has come to the end of this portion of my story, it may, perhaps, be admitted that I had a strange and subtle consciousness of the presence of one who was to influence my destiny, and who, without seeing or hearing, I felt to be near me.

Between the room those persons occupied and mine was a folding door—a common enough fashion in continental hotels, that the apartments may be thrown open if required, and the fashion was copied here; but the door in question was, of course, securely locked and bolted on both sides, so that no guest could intrude on the privacy of another, and to do so might be perilous in that region of stilettos and revolvers.

I had tossed aside the *Diario*, and lay long watching the light of the setting sun as it streamed through the tall case-ment, till sleep was beginning to overpower me, and I was just about to indulge in a postprandial nap, when a voice said sharply, in the next room, and in English:

"Madam, if we are to quarrel, do me the favour to speak in French. These partitions are unpleasantly thin. Do you understand me?"

I then heard a heavy sigh, followed by the sobbing of a woman.

"Tears again!" growled the man in French. "Bah, I am tired of tears."

"And so am I," was the timid response. "Yet they are my only solace."

"You weep for hours now."

"Hours that are years to me—years, indeed, of sorrow," replied the lady, also speaking in French, but with a singular pathos in it, that stirred my heart wonderfully, and made my pulses quicken. "Have you no pity, monsieur?"

"None!"

"What of the marriage ceremony?"

"Pshaw! a sorrowful and worn-out farce. Talk not to me of it. Besides, you will spoil your appearance, and remember that to-night we are to be at the opera."

But again the female sobbed heavily.

"How much more of this am I to endure, or be compelled to overhear?" thought I, while starting from the couch on which I was reclining. "The opera! I, too shall go to the opera. As well to kill time there as anywhere else."

I looked at my watch. It was within an hour of the time when the overture would begin, so I proceeded to make my toilet in all haste to be gone, though irresistibly attracted by the presence and the voices of those in the next room, yet I had met no one who spoke French at the *table d'hôte*.

"Who is this man that you should fear to look upon him—the man whom you saw in the public square?"

"Oho, monsieur is jealous," thought I.

"I dare not tell you," replied the woman, whose accents made my heart thrill. "If it was, indeed, a man, and not a disembodied spirit, I saw—he looked so wan, so pale."

"You dare not?"

"No."

"Wherefore?"

"You are so cruel—so merciless—so jealous."

"Speak out, or——"

I could imagine I saw the woman cower beneath the uplifted hand and half-arrested oath.

"Well, I was about to be married to him; but that is all past now—past for ever. Yet he loved me—oh, he did so love me!"

The last exclamation was made in the softest English, and in a tone that moved my very soul. That plaintive voice, whose was it, and who were those quarrellers?

The voice of the woman had a strange, dull, and monotonous tone in it generally, as if grief was destroying or gradually rendering it hoarse. Yet it painfully reminded me of one with which I was familiar. Was it that of Fanny or Clarice which it resembled? If she was not drowned, would the volatile Fanny have eloped, and forgotten Douglas as speedily as she did Major Carysfort? I was becoming quite bewildered. I must freely own that I listened intently now, but, as they had lowered their voices, I lost much that passed.

"Alas! alas!" said the lady, after a pause, "need I say, monsieur, that love which is forced becomes—becomes—"

Her voice broke into sobs again.

"Ah! what does it become?" demanded the other, striking his heel on the polished floor.

"Must I say it?"

"Yes."

"Hatred."

"Ah! hatred—yes, you are right. So I hate you, and I shall kill you before I have done with you." He swore a deep, hoarse oath in guttural Dutch, and then added, "Ach Gott! you weep because you have lost this fellow, this schelm, this ideal man, who is so different—or was so different from the man you married—for his own folly."

"Oh, what is before me now but a dreary future—a short one, I hope?" moaned the female.

"Indeed!" sneered the other.

"Yes ; a future in which the love I hoped for has no part, and yet my heart is a loving one—a future peopled only by the spectres of departed happiness and youth, of love and trust, and all that makes life worth having,"

"We grow actually poetical," sneered the man (how I longed to punch the fellow's head) ; "but I begin to grow tired of quarrelling even in French, and we shall be late to join our friends at the opera, while you will quite spoil your eyes, madam, and, though tears are very touching when oozing between alabaster fingers, they weary and they worry me."

Soon after I heard a door opened and shut with genuine spiteful and matrimonial violence. Silence followed, and I knew that they were gone.

My toilette complete, I sallied forth and sought the hotel porter, whose livery was somewhat like the uniform of a Spanish general officer ; but neither he nor the only waiter then at hand could tell me who those people were, or anything about them, save that they were wealthy strangers, had been at the Caballo Blanco for several days, and seemed to be very proud and exclusive, as they never sat at the *table d'hôte*, or left their apartments save in the evening—all of which served to pique my curiosity more than ever.

The clerk, Antonio Ojeda, who kept the hotel books—in which, no doubt, their names were entered—was absent, but I should know all about them when he returned. Their names were not, as yet, chalked up on the address-board in the entrance hall, or on the second *étage*. So with this meagre information I was forced to content me, and set forth to the opera.

I soon got my seat in the front stalls, though caring nothing about the performance, and having come thither merely to kill time. The theatre was handsome, spacious, and brilliantly illuminated by coloured wax lights, as his Excellency Señor el Gobernador of the island was expected to honour the performance with his presence.

Already all parts of the house were filling fast, and many beautiful women with superb toilets were present.

All rose when the governor of Puerto Rico—a solemn and pompous-looking old hidalgo, with long white moustaches—entered, accompanied by several ladies and by his staff, brilliant with gold lace, stars, medals, and epaulettes.

The opera was to be “Belisario,” and while the overture was being played by the orchestra (most of whom were men of colour), the seats on each side of me were occupied respectively by José Casanova, the kind Spanish captain who had picked us up at sea, and by Don Ramon de la Puente, a handsome young officer of Spanish artillery, with whom I had become acquainted at the *table d’hôte*, and during my wanderings in the citadel. The former was in the accurate funereal black, which is deemed full-dress throughout the world now, and the latter was in his uniform—blue, faced with scarlet and laced with silver. His epaulettes and gorget were also of silver.

“I wonder if *la bella Inglesa* will be here to-night?” said Casanova, who took all a sailor’s interest in the softer sex.

“Who is she?” asked I, with an air of genuine indifference.

“That is just what no one knows.”

“Many charming women are here to-night, and more are arriving every moment,” said I, and I might have added truly that, save one, all women in the world were alike to me.

“Ah! but she is said to be gloriously beautiful, and tender and touching in appearance as a Madonna of Murillo,” said Don Ramon, who was sweeping the boxes with a powerful lorgnette.

“Yet Puerto Rico seems to know nothing about her,” observed Casanova.

“But Puerto Rico says a great deal, for all that,” replied Don Ramon, laughing, and showing a row of very white teeth under a close-trimmed moustache.

“Too often the way or the world in larger places than this,” said I; “but in this instance, Don Ramon?”

“Well, some people aver that she is married, some are ill-natured enough to assert that she is not; others that they are

a couple who have eloped from the Bahamas or the Spanish Main, and who have married in haste and repented at leisure. But, hush, senores, the box door opens. Here she comes—here she comes !”

“How beautiful !” exclaimed Casanova, in a low tone.

“What a complexion !” said the other, while I looked towards the group which had entered the box breathlessly, for my power of respiration seemed to be suspended, and I stood in the stalls, regardless of what those around me might think, as if rooted there and turned to stone.

My companions continued to address me ; but I heard, them not or totally failed to comprehend them.

Two ladies and two gentlemen entered the box in full dress, and took their seats with perfect composure and an air of good breeding. The toilets of the former, even to their handkerchiefs and bouquets, were complete in style.

One of those ladies was Clarice Haywood—my own Clarice—beyond a doubt, but looking pale as a marble statue, her bright auburn hair smoothly braided over the white temples and exquisite little ears, almost without ornament. Her dark silk dress was cut somewhat low, revealing a neck and shoulders that, by contrast with the dress itself, seemed white as alabaster. There was a deadly pallor about her, a strange sadness in her lips and eyes, and over all her features and her bearing a painful air of utter desolation.

Trembling violently in every limb, I took without permission the lorgnette from the hand of the astonished Don Ramon, and surveyed her through it.

She was my Clarice beyond all doubt, living, and in safety—the one woman who had escaped on the raft ; but the tall, sombre fellow who leaned over the back of her chair, and whose face was almost as white as his ample shirt front, whose close-shorn hair was black as his full dress suit, and whose features seemed immovable, was the living image of that terrible Schalk van Neukerque whom I had met in Africa.

Oh, what terrible mystery was I now to unravel, if it could be unravelled at all.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

"S. VAN NEUKERQUE!"

The passenger whose initials and name I had seen in the cabin list of the unfortunate Eugenie at Cape Town.

The fit of his pale lavender kid gloves was perfect, and perfect too was the style of his evening costume. His whole appearance was calm and gentlemanly, more so than it had ever appeared to me in Cape Colony; and yet—and yet—Oh, I knew not what to do or to think of the whole situation—of his being there, and with her. I feared that my senses were leaving me.

"Senor, are you ill?" asked Don Ramon, with a little *hauteur* in his manner, as he added, "Permit me," and bluntly retook his glass from my passive hand.

"Pardon me, senor," I moaned out; "but I know not what I do."

"So it seems," replied the Spaniard, and shrugged his shoulders.

I turned my back on "Belisario." What to me were the new and superb costumes, the real horses which pranced upon the stage as they drew the triumphal car? and what to me was the beauty of the ballet-girls, or of the two *prime donne* who acted the wife and daughter of the hero, and were yet precisely of the same age, and who sang so sweetly that the stage was covered with gorgeous bouquets, and rings and even bracelets were flung to them.

In the face of Clarice was a settled sadness of expression most painful to look upon. It might be—nay, I flattered myself that it must have been—caused by sorrow for the horrible death by which I was supposed to have perished—the death of poor Hans Bruine Kasteel. But that had happened many months ago—three parts of a year had elapsed since then; and Father Time, if he is an avenger, is also a great consoler, so whence this morbid grief?

But her companion was a dreadful puzzle to me. Was this



a case of resurrection, of resuscitation, or of coincidental likeness? He could not be a mere vulgar ghost!

"How can it be?" thought I. "Did I not see him shot down by Van Bommel, decapitated by Adrian Africander, and buried deep in that lonely kloof among the mountains, where the green mound of his grave was visible and all undisturbed when I told his terrible story to Clarice, to Douglas, and the Carysforts? Is it possible that there could be two men in the world of the same name, and so exactly and terribly alike—perhaps with the same alleged horrible proclivities?"

A spectre? Impossible! He was seen by and conversing with others. But how many of the great and learned have believed such things to be possible?

Yet, though this was no spectral appearance on which I was gazing now, it proved something more difficult of comprehension than a mere optical illusion. The likeness petrified me, for he was the very image of Schalk van Neukerque. Was this, or *that*, man a magician? Had the former sold himself to Satan, or what did it all mean?

About half an hour elapsed—a half hour that seemed an eternity—during which I felt as if in a kind of dream, surrounded by unrealities, and incapable of making up my mind what to do, till I came to the resolution of leaving the pit stalls at the close of the first act, and making my way to the box-keeper, for the purpose of sending my name to Clarice.

Time appeared to stand still, and the act-drop as if it would never fall. Encore succeeded encore; my impatience could no longer be restrained, and I rose to quit the stalls, keeping my eyes fixed on the pale face of her I sought.

At that moment, she must have seen me for the first time, for suddenly I perceived her eyes to dilate wildly, as if with mingled astonishment, terror, and grief. She stretched out her trembling hands towards me, and sank from her seat with a low, wailing cry.

Every one in the boxes and pit rose simultaneously to their feet, and on all hands I heard cries of—

"La bella Inglese!"

"She has fainted!"

"Throw open the box door. Air, air!"

"Keep your seats, senores."

"Sit still, senoras, I implore you."

"Here is a row," growled one. "We might think the house was on fire."

Others pointed their fingers angrily at me, and spoke of the evil eye—the *mal ojo*—a superstition as common among the Spaniards as among the Russians and Italians; but such were the exclamations I heard on all sides of me, while forcing my way, now with emotions more than ever keenly excited, into the box lobby. But to get near the box of my dear Clarice was impossible, so dense was the crowd of admiring and excited gentlemen around it.

"Allow me to pass you, gentlemen, I entreat—I implore—I command you!" said I. "The lady is my friend—my friend, I assure you." (How cold seemed the word 'friend'!) "I must and shall pass."

I was fast becoming furious on finding that my passage was steadily opposed by a bulky Spaniard, who wore some official costume, and was no way disposed to move.

"Do you hear me, senor?" I shouted in his ear.

"Que zambra arma vim alla!" (*i. e.*, "What a thundering noise you make!") he replied, grinding his teeth with anger, and very deliberately planting his elbow into my chest to push me back. Thus filled with rage by his utter stolidity as opposed to my own impatience, I seized him by the throat and hurled him on one side.

In an instant, a score of angry hands were laid upon me, and two soldiers in Spanish uniform, armed and accoutred, appeared as suddenly as if they had been shot up a stage trap. A fixed bayonet was opposed to my breast, and I was dragged by some, pushed by others, and hustled by all out of the box lobby and into the street without a moment being given to me for breathing or explanation.

"What is the matter? What has he done?" I heard the voice of worthy Captain Casanova demanding.

"A drunken Englishman has assaulted senor the alcalde."

So the bulky personage whom I had knocked over so unceremoniously was the chief magistrate of the city.

Followed by a crowd of dirty *gamins*, I was marched through the moonlit streets of Puerto Rico to the common *carcel*, or police-office, where, after being searched for weapons, and, as it eventually proved, being robbed of my portmonnaie, I was locked in a filthy stone room by the stolid and uninquiring *carcelero*, and left to my own reflections.

The late episode was full of perplexities to the head and to the heart. I looked at the truckle-bed on which I sat, and shuddered. How many unhappy wretches had laid their heads on its wooden pillow before going forth, chained, to work in the mountains, or, perhaps, to be strangled by the steel garotte, and as I thought of that the prison chamber seemed to fill with tattered and gristly phantoms.

I felt weary, weary indeed, that night, but could not sleep. My heart was full of joy that she was living, yet it was troubled by strange fears, that as yet could take no coherence ; so it seemed to me as if I should never sleep again, my nervous system was so shattered and shaken ; and when the gray, chill dawn stole in, and the rising sun cast the shadow of the iron grating on the stone pavement where yesternight the silver moon had thrown them, I was still seated motionless as a stone, and still oppressed by thoughts that I could not unravel.

The careless and beetle-browed, black-bearded, and most repulsive-looking fellow, whose chief attire consisted of his yellow nankeen trousers and a straw hat, and who had large silver rings in his ears, and a knife in the strap which held up his nether vestments, brought me some coffee and boiled beans for breakfast, varied by boiled beans and coffee for dinner ; but the dreary day passed into the drearier night without my being brought before the irate *alcalde* to explain, or be punished ; and more than all, without *her* making inquiry into my fate.

I ventured to inquire about the *alcalde* of my keeper, who, by his appearance, had doubtless been in his time a thief, assassin, or picaroon of some kind.

"Senor the alcalde has gone with his excellency the governor to Aguada Nueva, at the other end of the island, some twenty leagues or more, and will not be back for a week."

"And must I remain here for a week?" I exclaimed.

"Demonio! if you saw the place to which he will send you, Senor Inglese, you would not be in such a deuce of a hurry to change your quarters."

"But I have friends to seek out," said I, half imploringly, even to the fellow who had neither the power nor the will to serve me; but perhaps my spirit was sinking, and even Fabrique Balarino might prove a friend.

"Friends! I can't help that," he growled, in reply.

"And my passage for Jamaica is engaged for the twentieth of this month."

"'Tis well you have secured it," said the fellow, with a sneer, "as I fear much the twentieth of the month may find you still here, and the twentieth of a few months to come, breaking stones in the yard."

And with a malevolent grin he replaced his cigar in his mouth and left me.

One moment I was full of blind fury, and examined the bars of the window and the bolts of the door, in the wild hope of an escape—an escape which, even if achieved, would only result in an ignominious recapture; and the next moment a black and heavy despair settled in my heart, and I seemed to bow my head to the sea of dark and troubled thoughts that flowed over me.

However, I was not so deserted as I deemed myself, for just as the darkness was closing I was roused from my reverie by hearing the heavy bolts of my door withdrawn, and the cheerful voice of Captain Casanova, who had come to visit me, accompanied by Don Ramon, the young artillery officer, ushered in by Fabrique Balarino.

"You did not think we were going to abandon you, senor," said Casanova, as he shook my hand; "but the scrape you got into was an awkward one."

"'Pon my honour, yes," added the officer, laughing. "To knock over the alcalde like a ninepin, and close by the box of his excellency the governor too."

"If I could but explain—"

"There is nothing to explain," said Don Ramon.

"How so, senor?"

"It has all been explained for you."

"By whom?"

"By me."

"By you, Don Ramon?"

"The alcalde is my uncle, and I have just come in from Aguada Nueva with an order for your immediate release ; but on two conditions."

"Oh, how can I thank you, senor?"

"By complying with the conditions, which are very simple."

"Pray name them," said I eagerly.

"To write a suitable apology to senor my uncle, and pay some twenty dollars to the poor of the city."

This seemed to be getting rid of the affair on very easy terms. I speedily complied with them, borrowed a dollar from Casanova for Fabrique, the carcelero, which I tossed to him, and once more I felt my heart lighter as my lungs were expanded by the pure night air, when I walked a free man through the streets of Puerto Rico, accompanied by my two friends, to the Hotel del Caballo Blanco.

Anxious to make inquiries carefully and warily, I summoned Antonio Ojeda, the clerk of the hotel.

"Are you a native of this place?" I inquired suavely.

"No, senor ; soy hijo de Andalusia," he replied, with a proud smile.

"Bueno hijo mio," said I. "Quien dice Espana dice todo." ("Whoever says 'Spain' says everything.")

The fine eyes of the young Spaniard sparkled, and I felt that he was my servant at once.

"A person named Van Neukerque is residing here?"

"Was ! The Senor van Neukerque left the hotel yesterday with another gentleman and two ladies."

"Did they all reside here?"

"Who, senor—the other gentleman and ladies?"

"Yes—yes—all."

"No—the Senor van Neukerque alone. A lady came to visit him at times ; but she dwelt elsewhere in the city with her friends."

A lady, thought I. Could this lady be Clarice, whose voice I had certainly heard on that eventful evening?

"His apartment adjoined mine on the second floor?"

"Exactly, senor."

"And a lady came to visit him, you say?"

"Twice only. Her beauty was remarkable. She was pale and brown-haired, with minute and regular features."

"And him, Antonio—describe him," I said, with a heart from which the life seemed ebbing.

Antonio, who seemed a shrewd fellow, gave me the description in a few words, and he was undoubtedly one of the persons I had seen in the opera box.

"There may be some mistake after all about the lady visitor," said Don Ramon, who had been attentively watching me, and with some commiseration, "for Antonio's description of pale, regular, and minute features, with brown hair, will suit exactly both the ladies whom we saw at the opera. Thus, we cannot be certain which of them came thus mysteriously to the Caballo Blanco."

"Most true, Don Ramon, and singular to say, I never even looked at the other lady," said I, with a sigh of relief. "For the hope of this chance yet left me I have indeed to thank you."

Here was a doubt certainly ; but the voice I had heard—the voice that said such strange and piteous things—was it not that of Clarice Haywood ?

"From whence did these people come, Antonio?"

"I cannot say, senor—the lady was always so sad, the gentleman so reserved."

All further inquiry as to who the other lady and gentleman were, where they had resided, and whither the quartette had

gone, proved fruitless. All I could learn was that they had sailed from San Juan de Puerto Rica in one of seven large vessels which had lain windbound off the morro for several days ; but no one could inform us in which vessel, or for what part of the world.

She had seen me, and uttered that low, wailing cry, the memory of which was ever in my ears, and yet had sailed from the island without enquiring about me. How was this, and if so, whence the deep emotion on beholding me ? Then my natural love and fear suggested that she might be ill—too ill, perhaps, for exertion ; and if so, why did her friends submit her to the peril of a sea voyage ?

And who were those friends ? They were neither Douglas nor Fanny, yet they might be surviving passengers of the lost Eugenie. Was the other lady Van Neukerque's wife ? and if so, why did she not live at the hotel ? Alas, but for my own impatience and that unlucky row in the box lobby, I should by this time have known all.

I was ill for some days after this, and went on board the Hernan Cortes in a species of fever ; but it was a fever of thought, for I had but three distant ideas, and each was a perplexity.

First, that I had seen Clarice alive and well in the company of three persons, with whom she had gone, heaven alone knew where. I had my choice of surmises, for the seven ships which sailed from the morro were for seven different parts of the world.

Second, that a vessel called the Eugenie had reached Kingston, in Jamaica, safely, long ago, as recorded in the newspaper.

Third, that the Neukerque with whom I had seen Miss Haywood had certainly been one of the passengers in that Eugenie which left Cape Town, as surely as she herself had been. Then, had Douglas and Fanny perished, and Clarice been the solitary woman on the raft with Neukerque—and who was he ?

“I never alarm myself when everything is hopelessly wrong,

and villany deliciously triumphant on the "stage," says a character in a modern romance, "for I know that somebody who died in the first act will come in at the centre door, and make it all right ere the curtain falls."

But here, it would appear, was somebody who died long ago coming in and making it all wrong.

And when I remembered what Don Ramon had said so heedlessly at the opera of how the gossips of Puerto Rico had been so busy with the name of *La Bella Inglesa*, I shivered with bitterness of heart.

I seemed to have had two lives—a past and a present state of existence; thus, as if to preserve the links between them I often unfolded, spread out, and carefully—yea wistfully—read over the pencilled letters of Clarice and Douglas, sent to me when a prisoner in the hands of Sandilli, little dreaming that my liberty was the price of theirs; the confession of Mark Sharkeigh; and that fatal and mysterious message from the sea, all of which I kept together, as one might the tape-bound charters of their inheritance, and which, having been in my pocket-book, were the only things I saved from the wreck of the *Wanderer*.

On the 20th of the month I sailed from Puerto Rico for Kingston, in Jamaica, where ere long I hoped to hear some of these conflicting circumstances explained away.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE voyage of more than seven hundred miles passed away like a dream. In due time, though delayed by an accident to our machinery, we sighted Jamaica, with all its beautiful hills, its picturesque cliffs and green savannahs, and were steaming into Kingston harbour by the long lagoon, formed by a sand-bank called oddly the Palisades, four miles in length, past our stately flagship, the Queen's Dockyard, and the Naval Hospital.

A little while, and we were warped alongside the quay, and we—the passengers, white, yellow, and black—we who for



days had dined at the same table, and discussed the thermometer over salt pork, ham and yams, soup, made of claret, *pâté de foie gras*, eggs, and vegetables all in one mess, with biscuits full of weevils, now turned our backs on the two red funnels of the Hernan Cortes and on each other, separating too probably never to meet again.

"Be dis your plunder, massa?" asked a negro porter, with a grin, as he shouldered my portmanteau, and away we went to a hotel, which, like nearly all the others in Kingston, was kept by a lady of colour.

On the way I met a white soldier, of whom I immediately inquired if there was "a Captain Gerard Douglas here on the staff?"

"Yes, sir," replied the soldier. "He came from the Cape some time ago; but he ain't in Kingston just now."

"Where then?" I asked, tremulous with joy and anxiety.

"He lives at Datetree Pen, near the Newcastle Barracks."

"And where are they?"

"Good eighteen miles from Kingston."

"Thanks, my man. Now to learn the true story of the Eugenie," I exclaimed, much to the soldier's astonishment, and hurried after my sable guide, whom I rewarded so well for his labour that he danced a fandango, exclaiming--

"Tank you, massa; me tank you. De white gemmen hab plenty ob money, and de Lord give plenty ob yam."

Once more I saw shops with English names and familiar signboards, and in the windows of some were visible many well-known London newspapers and periodicals; but the houses, which were chiefly of wood, or ill-built brick, all rugged and disreputable in aspect, looked gloomy, and the streets, which are beds of sand in dry weather, become veritable water-courses in the wet season, when, grim and yellow, the fever king comes from his lair in the marshes.

Even to me, who had seen so much of the world now, the people in those streets seemed strange. Planters in white attire with vast straw hats; black soldiers of the 4th West India Regiment, called locally "Queen Victoria's niggers,"

dressed like zouaves, their scarlet jackets faced with green ; negroes in no attire at all, though the negresses were sometimes clad in the extreme of the mode, with white muslins or scarlet silks, with pork-pie hats, blue veils and bugles, pink gloves and green parasols.

To reach the house of Douglas ere night fell was all my object now, for there is no twilight in those latitudes. The sun sinks into the sea, and all the world is dark at once.

I had my hair cut short and beard shaven close, and my moustaches reduced to the orthodox Horse Guards pattern, and all my outward man made every way as like the Dick Haddon of the old time, when I came on leave from the —th Fusiliers to pleasant Walcot Tower, there from a holiday idler to become a lover ; and procuring a horse, I left Kingston at a hard gallop for my new destination.

I yearned to see my old friend Gerard Douglas—that Douglas “so tender and true ;” for he was perhaps the only friend I possessed on earth, and to his children and Fanny’s, if they ever had any, I would leave all I possessed in the world if Clarice was indeed lost to me.

A ride of eighteen miles by breakneck cliffs and through dangerous passes, that wound under the shadow of the famous Blue Mountains, which tower skyward eight thousand feet or more, brought me to the spacious barracks of the white troops at Newcastle, situated amid lovely scenery, vast woodlands, and abrupt crags, where many a gaily-painted, white-walled, and beautiful villa was nestling.

“A queer place is this Jamaica,” thought I. “Queer-looking people, inodorous plants, trees, and flowers ; wondrous birds and animals, fish and serpents too.”

In one of these cosy villas—Datetree Pen—I was informed by a sentinel, Captain Douglas of the staff “resided with his family,” whatever that might mean. It certainly boded that there were more than Fanny only.

High beat my heart as I turned up a road where the avocado pears and sweet yams might be had for the gathering, and from thence along an avenue of magnificent bamboos and

cotton trees, the luxuriant foliage of each covering a vast extent of ground with grateful shadow. At last I dismounted before the villa, which was lofty, handsome, and encircled by a broad verandah, the shadow of which, under the bright, fierce rays of the afternoon sun, formed a strong dark line upon the white walls.

So this was the pleasant and luxurious home of Douglas after all his rough campaigning. A very little time now and I should learn all—should see Clarice, perhaps, herself, should learn the mystery of her being at Puerto Rico, why she had fainted, and then disappeared so mysteriously; yet I felt an involuntary nervousness creeping over me as I approached the door, after tossing my bridle-rein to a negro servant.

As I passed under the shady portico I perceived an oriel window, which opened from the ceiling to the floor, standing invitingly unclosed on my left hand, and there a female figure was reclining on a luxurious *fauteuil*.

Something familiar to my eye in the outline of that recumbent figure made my fast-beating heart to beat quicker still. Though I had a genuine British horror of creating what is called a "scene," presuming on my intimacy with my old friend and comrade Gerard, instead of ringing the bell at the front door, I entered what proved to be an elegant drawing-room by the tall open window, and saw that a lady was asleep in the recess of the oriel—asleep, with a black lace veil—a species of mosquito curtain, perhaps—thrown over her face and shoulders, and in figure, hands, and general contour she powerfully and vividly reminded me of Clarice.

Our voyage had been greatly protracted by the breaking down of our starboard engine when off the southern coast of Hispaniola; thus I was not without a desperate hope that she might have reached Jamaica before me.

Oh, with what a gush of terrible doubts, of tenderness and conflicting emotions in my heart, did I stand for a few moments, gazing on the veiled sleeper, who breathed so softly and gently in her siesta, induced, no doubt, by the drowsy tropical heat.

Impelled by an emotion which I could no longer control, lest it might choke me, I stooped over her and tenderly took her hand in mine. She started up, threw aside the black lace veil, and revealed—not the features I expected, but the fair and smiling, yet startled, face and rippling golden tresses of Fanny—Fanny Carysfort once, the wife of Douglas now.

So it was but a family likeness in figure after all. Her bright blue eyes on beholding me sparkled with astonishment that was great, but not so great as I then thought all our mutual circumstances warranted.

“Haddon !” she exclaimed, starting up, and kissing me with all the playful rompishness of her girlhood ; “Dick Haddon—dear, dear Dick Haddon—here !”

“As you see, Fanny.”

“I thought you were at Puerto Rico. How strange ! I was just dreaming of you. Why or how is it that we so often think or speak of those whom we are just about to see, or who may be near us ?”

“Probably it is a magnetic influence.”

“‘Speak of an angel, and you are sure to see its wings.’”

“‘Speak of the devil,’ &c. That is another version, Fanny. So I was at Puerto Rico.”

“I knew that, if not dead—dead,” she added, as the gay expression passed out of her beautiful face.

“Why dead ?”

“We heard first of a skeleton being found in the Caffre forest beyond the Amatolas—a horrible story. It was thought to be yours, my poor Dick, for your Highland bonnet was found near it. Then Clarice wrote that she had seen you in the public Plaza, and in the theatre of Puerto Rico, and that at first she thought you were the spectre of yourself, or an illusion, the effect of her own imagination. ‘I did not speak with him,’ she wrote. ‘Oh, Fanny, Fanny, he will never forgive me till I die !’ But tell me, dearest Dick, are you not a veritable Wandering Jew ?”

Low sank my heart again while Fanny spoke ; but now

Douglas, who had heard our voices, and paused in wonder for a minute at the door, sprang forward, and took me in his arms as a brother might have done.

"Welcome, old fellow—welcome, as if from the land of shadows!" he exclaimed, as he clasped my hand with his—"his steadfast, blameless right hand, which never failed a friend nor injured an enemy," save when the latter felt the edge of the claymore as he led on his Highlanders. "So you were not killed, after all, my dear old friend—not killed after all?"

"Not a bit of it," said I; "and you—you did not suffer shipwreck?"

"No. We did not encounter even a gale of wind, which was fortunate, as my little Fanny is a very bad sailor."

"Most strange! Off the Island of Ascension we picked up a bottle—a message from the sea, as it is called."

"Wonders will never cease. You found that bottle? It was a rascally hoax, perpetrated by Percival Graves and a young planter, both of whom thought it 'doocid good fun.'"

"Fun that well nigh broke my heart," said I, bitterly, while I mentally consigned the Guardsman and the planter to the realms of a potentate not to be named to ears polite.

"It enraged the master of the *Eugenie*, who was superstitious enough to suppose that some calamity might really come to pass in consequence. I am here on the staff, now. I was awfully sorry to leave the dear old *Seventy-fourth*; but when a man gets married in the service— Ah, you know all about that sort of thing."

"I know nothing about it, Gerard," said I, somewhat petulantly; "but there are two things I would wish to know. What have you made of Clarice, and why was she at Puerto Rico alone?"

"Alone?"

"Yes, without her friends."

"What," said he gravely, while an expression of deep commiseration stole over his face, "don't you know about—this event?"

"About what event? How could I ever learn aught, circumstanced as I have been?"

"Then you have not heard of her—her marriage?"

Though stunned by the last word, I had still strength to falter out—

"With whom?"

"The wealthy—or supposed to be wealthy—Dutch planter."

"With Schalk van Neukerque?"

"No—Schencke van Neukerque. Schalk, his brother, was killed among the mountains near Graham's Town. Don't you remember the grotesque story you told us about the poor fellow, and how remorselessly the Dutch boors knocked him on the head? There must have been something mysterious about him, however, for Schencke denied all relationship to Schalk until after the marriage at Kingston, when he seemed suddenly to remember that the slain man was his twin brother. I must own to disliking this feature in the affair," added Douglas, whose honest cheek was now a flaming red. "But you look faint, Dick. Here, drink this."

And he poured out for me a stiff glass of brandy and water, the imbibing of which saved me, perhaps, from reeling and falling on the floor of polished cedarwood.

"Compose yourself, my dear fellow. I see the shock has been too great for you, and the heat has, perhaps, affected you; but it is a pleasant place, this Datetree Pen, even when the quicksilver stands at ninety-five in the shade."

My mind was filled with one or two prevailing ideas—that Clarice was lost to me for ever now, married to that repulsive-looking creature whose odious likeness arose from his being the twin brother of Schalk—that I had undergone so much mental suffering, bodily peril, and had travelled so far only to learn this—that I had actually been in the same hotel with her seven hundred miles away, divided from her only by a thin partition—that hers were the moans I had heard—that already she was unhappy—that now, perhaps, she was dying, this woman that I loved so truly and so tenderly; and then with grief and horror I recalled the miser-

able conversation I had been compelled to overhear, the cold-blooded sneers of the man, the pitiful sobs of the woman, and his threat—

"I hate you, and shall kill you before I am done with you!"

And she was away—far, far away—and helpless, in this man's power.

His brother—the twin brother of Schalk—if they were as much alike in nature as in appearance!

I seated myself, and covered my face with my hands. Then Douglas patted me on the shoulder, and said:

"Take courage. As a modern writer has it, 'Man in his misery thinks much of his misery; but as soon as he is out of it it is forgotten, and becomes, perhaps, a subject for mirth.' So in time you will forget this—get over it in time, and all that."

"Was it so with you in your time, Gerard?" I asked, reproachfully. "Have you forgotten the long and sad conferences we used to have on the march together?"

Fanny blushed and stole an arm caressingly round me.

"Oh, Fanny?" said I, "for your sister I felt that deep and passionate love which death alone can quench. And now, after all that you have told me, I—I feel it still. Married! and to the man called Neukerque! Fanny! Fanny! and this is the being I so loved, that I could have knelt down and worshipped, even as Dante worshipped Beatrice when he met her in the meads of Paradise!"

"Poor Dick!" and her little hand smoothed my hair as she spoke. "I don't think Clarice or I deserved to be loved so well as we have been. But she thought you dead."

So Douglas and I had exactly changed places!

"But let us wait a little," said I; "and after a time you will tell me gently how this calamity came about, for a calamity it is indeed to me."

## CHAPTER XLIX.

"AND she deemed me dead?"

"Yes ; killed by the Caffres," replied Fanny, with her eyes full of tears.

"She, and all of us ; we never doubted it," said Douglas.

"The poor thing wore black for you till a few days before her—marriage," added Fanny, in an exculpatory tone.

"But how came it about, Fanny ; this strange, this monstrous marriage?" I asked impetuously, after a long pause.

"Why monstrous or strange, Dick, under all the circumstances?" asked Fanny, with her blue eyes full of tears.

"What were those circumstances?"

"He saved her life from drowning when she fell into the water between the ship and the boat in Table Bay."

"In the water?" I repeated. "She—her—my poor Clarice, my love ! And he saved her, you say?"

"Yes ; saved her life at the risk of his own, for there was a heavy sea on, and the water was full of sharks," said Douglas. "He thus earned an everlasting claim to her gratitude, at least. It was a time of horror. Fanny fainted, and I grew sick with absolute apprehension. Then he was our fellow voyager for so many thousand miles ; and his manner, so suave and winning, had a good basis to work upon, in the fact of his having preserved her life. She was sad and lonely, too ; though not haunted morbidly by the memory of your supposed death."

"No ; it would seem not," said I bitterly.

"Yet, when this intimacy resulted in marriage, it surprised me a little, as I did not like the idea of a foreign brother-in-law," said Fanny ; "but he—he had—"

"Money, I suppose?"

"Don't think bitterly of poor Clarice," urged Douglas.

"No ; not money, Dick."

"What then, Fanny?"

"A strange magnetic power over her, as Douglas phrased



it ; a secret influence against which she seemed to struggle in vain. It might be indifference to life, perhaps. I know not how to describe it ; but he seemed to influence her will, her thoughts, and all her actions, just as Joseph Balsamo did those of the girl in Dumas' novel—you know what I mean."

"Not very clearly," I replied ; "but her marriage to this man, Fanny, was it legally perfect in all respects?"

"It was performed by the Bishop of Jamaica."

"And, save one, was perfect in all respects," added Douglas. "I cannot help thinking that it had an omission, which sometimes occurs."

"And what requisite was that?"

"Love."

"Oh, Fanny ! And you allowed your sister to do this?"

"To marry?"

"Yes, a person like this man ; and yet you call yourself a Christian, and go to church every Sunday, and do all the duties of a religious parade, no doubt."

"Since I gave up flirting, eh, Dick?"

"Oh, heaven ? Can you actually jest with me, and at a time like this?" I exclaimed angrily.

"Pardon me, Dick ; I do not jest, though I would fain try to soothe, even to laugh you out of what is hopeless now. She felt herself alone in the world ; and after the terrors we had undergone when in the hands of the Caffres, had no doubt grown tired of being dragged with me wherever my husband's duty led him. She was independent of me, too ; for by the death of a relative so distant that we scarcely knew of his existence, we succeeded to a thousand a year each, before leaving Cape Town."

"Alas, Fanny !" said I, quite forgetting to offer her my congratulations on this good fortune, "she knows not what she has done. She has blighted the future, destroyed the life of a strong-hearted and single-minded fellow, for such I believe myself to be—one who has conceived a love for her

so deep that he can never unlearn to love her, or root the passion from his heart."

"So you think, and so will all think at times," said Fanny, while the colour deepened in her cheek; "but you will find some one else to love, Dick, be assured of that."

"Never!"

"Why so?"

"Can you ask me why? The first, last, and solitary love of my heart was your sister Clarice, and the hand of heaven alone could light another passion there!"

"Poor Dick!"

"Ay, poor, indeed, now!"

Fanny said and did all she could think of to soothe me while she spoke. I heard her voice, but seemed scarcely to know what she said. Had I suffered all, and undergone so much, only to find a blighting sequel such as this? In mist and gray obscurity all around me seemed at times to fade away, while there was a hissing sound in my ears, and a tightness over my heart.

By this fatal step Clarice Haywood had blighted two lives—her own and mine; but more than all her own. Oh, had I but achieved my escape from Sandilli sooner this might have been averted! And while Fanny was speaking, I chanced to see my own face in a mirror, when its expression startled me, and caused me to make an effort to seem calm, for therein I could see that my white lips were firmly set, my eyes were stony in their despair, and my colour was as that of death!

I felt sick of life, and with that sickness felt the craving that in sorrow comes over us, as we grow older in years, to be at rest in the dark place where none can disturb us.

In the loneliness of my loving heart, thrust back as it were upon itself, there were moments of vengeful and jealous thoughts, when I remembered almost regretfully the daughter of Sandilli—little Mariqua, who loved me so well, and from whom I had fled so pitilessly.

Poor savage girl, she was terribly avenged now!

So Clarice and her—how the word choked me—her husband had been at Puerto Rico on a visit *en route* for Europe—what part I cared not to inquire, for our paths in life must be apart for ever now—as Schencke van Neukerque had business to transact. What his business was no one knew, perhaps he did not know himself; but as he had complete control of Clarice's fortune, he was, of course, quite independent.

From this I feared that the man was a mere Dutch or German adventurer, who, notwithstanding her beauty, had entangled Clarice into a marriage for the sake of her money.

"They were to sail from San Juan de Puerto Rico for Europe about the 18th of last month," said Fanny.

"And they did so. Seven vessels sailed the same day, but I know not for where."

"And in the confusion of her spirits, poor Clarice did not tell us their destination in her farewell letter; but I think it must be Holland, or some part of Germany."

Lost as she was to me, I could but sigh.

"Is she happy with him?" I ventured to inquire, after a long pause.

"Alas, no; I greatly fear not."

"Already!"

"Already, Dick."

"Why and wherefore?"

"We know not; but her face looked so sad and weary in expression when I saw it last that my heart bled for her," said Fanny.

"And sad and weary sounded her voice when I heard it last," said I, as memory flashed back to the strange conversation which I had been compelled to overhear in the Hotel del Caballo Blanco.

Long that night did I linger with Douglas in the cool verandah, talking over my broken plans and shattered hopes, while the starry sky of the western world displayed its glorious constellations above us unheeded; and in my present mood I found the society of Percival Graves and some gay fellows,

who came over from the barracks, intolerable, as they chaffed and laughed, while sipping their coffee or iced claret, in West Indian phraseology taking "a long drink" from a tumbler or a "short" from a wine-glass outside the dining-room.

I soon saw that the heedless Fanny was as much immersed in gaiety as ever, and that Datetree Pen was a species of heaven to the young subs, who came out fresh from the provisional battalion at Chatham or Tilbury.

I remained for some months with Douglas; but Fanny reminded me so much of her sister, that her society, with all its charm, became so saddening to me that I resolved to leave Jamaica as soon as possible.

That Clarice—my pure, gentle, and lady-like Clarice—had been the wife of this man, was a thought of perpetual torture, from which I could not flee. It filled my heart with gnawing and corroding bitterness and rage.

And even with those tropical luxuries and necessities called mosquito curtains, one cannot sleep very sound on a bed in Jamaica. I say on, as people there never think of going into one.

I declined all invitations to the European mess at Newcastle Barracks, and to that of the 4th West Indian Regiment at Kingstown; and a card to a reception of his excellency the governor at Spanish Town was not even answered by me. I had become careless of everything, and as listless as Sambo himself, for Sambo was Douglas's principal valet, and was a very good specimen of the emancipated West Indian negro. For twelve hours out of the twenty-four he might be seen lying under a mangoe tree, eating oranges, pineapples, and bananas, or "sucking the monkey"—*i.e.* a cocoanut shell filled with fiery rum; but on Sunday he would preach and sing from the top of a hogshead in a way that would have enchanted all Exeter Hall.

During the few months I remained with Douglas at Date-tree Pen, letters came at intervals from Clarice to Fanny, whom they roused to tears and wrung our hearts. Her life was a lost one—her husband a horror. After a time they

ceased to come at all, and we could but surmise sorrowfully about her, till the time came when I was to resume my wandering, I knew not and cared not whither.

At last I took the West Indian and Pacific Company's steamer, that came from Port-au-Prince, for Liverpool; and as I bade Gerard Douglas adieu on the quay at Kingston Harbour, my heart was very full, and for a little time we stood face to face with our hands clasped in each other—the hard, tight, and silent grasp of those who are ashamed to weep.

## CHAPTER L.

How often is the destiny of a man hewn out, shaped and made before him by the character of the woman who has been his first love.

Clarice had been mine, and my destiny was to be a wanderer by land and sea.

Nearly a year had elapsed since these events, when I found myself located temporarily in Hamburg—perhaps the most dissipated city in Europe. From the day I had returned to the latter quarter of the globe I had been wandering about without any particular object, the most idle of all idle men.

In fact, after a life of considerable excitement and activity, I was now in a manner of way enjoying the vague luxury of utter idleness.

I had been up the Rhine—as who has not in these travelling times?—and “done” it all from the shores of the North Sea to the Glacier of the Rheinwald.

I had gone through the beauties of the Tyrol, and had nearly left my bones on the Great St. Bernard, as three of my fellow travellers did. We had passed the inn at Proz about seven o'clock in the evening, when the darkness had set in, the wind was blowing keen and fierce, and then on its biting blast the snow came swooping down from the ice-clad mountain sweeps.

My companions, three Americans, were foolhardy, and I set but little store on my life at any time now. In vain we were warned to abide the night at Proz, but we planted our alpen

stocks manfully into the ice, set our teeth to the blast, and pushed on ; but I alone, more dead than alive, reached the Hospice, for the three Americans perished by the wayside, and were found frozen hard and stiff next day not far from the mountain monastery.

Naples, Rome, Nice, and Paris were all favoured by me in succession. For a time I had lingered in the narrow vale of Baden-Baden, till I tired of its wood-covered hills and its dissipated fashionables, as I also did of Homburg, with all its hills and casinos, its *brunnens* and its bores, so I took my way from them, everywhere doing what John Murray expects every judicious tourist to do, going to the best hotels, seeing everything that is to be seen, and doing miles upon miles of pictures and statuary, galleries and arsenals, ruins and churches, till on an evening in September I found myself in the Hôtel de l'Europe, one of the largest and most magnificent caravansaries in Hamburg, that city of thieves and merchant princes.

It is situated on the Alsterdamm, and drowsily I sat at the lofty casement of my apartment, which was on the third *étage*, and this gave me an ample view of the Jungfernstieg, or Maiden's Walk, with all its stately hotels and *cafés*, its double rows of trees, and the endless stream of magnificent carriages with liveried couriers sporting epaulette and plume, cabs or droschkis, its crowds of passengers on horse and foot, and though last, not least, the beautiful sheet of the Alster Lake with all its tiny steamers gliding up and down between the bridge, and the pavillion, and the Fahr-huse Tea-gardens and more than a thousand gaily painted pleasure boats making its waters alive with gaiety and music.

The crash of drums and the notes of a fine brass band waking the echoes of the lofty Neuer Wall, came like an old familiar sound to my ears, and then, amid the scowls of the Hamburgers, the 75th and 76th Regiments of Prussian infantry, with bayonets fixed and the black eagle flying, defiled past on their way to Altona, with their intense air of military precision, their goatskin packs, spiked helmets, and dirty-

looking canvas trousers rolled up above the ankles of their blucher boots.

I had been a week in Hamburg on the evening in question, and was mentally dubious whether to take the first steamer for Hull in England, or for Christiania in Norway, so vague was my purpose, when a trivial incident that led to others was the means of causing me to remain.

As the evening was beautiful, I had descended to the portico of the hotel, and there was lingering over a pipe and glass tankard of lager beer, when a funeral procession passed, and the odd equipment of the attendants led me to follow it, though it seemed to attract no attention from the passers, who, of course, were daily used to such a sight.

The funeral party was entirely composed of public hired mourners, and not of the friends of the deceased. These men, sixteen in number, are always dressed in black, and after a very antique fashion. Round their necks were plaited ruffs, and they wore wigs, the long curls of which were profusely powdered. Their slashed doublets, trunk hose, and short cloaks were all of the old Spanish mode, and they were armed with long, slender, bowl-hilted rapiers, such as Ferdinand of Toledo might have worn.

Those same sixteen most sombre-looking persons, as I afterwards learned, attended when hired, all marriage festivals, and also formed the bodyguard of the magistrates, their places being purchased at a high price in consequence of the many perquisites, fees, and privileges attached to them.

Roused from my growing apathy by a procession attired so singularly, I relinquished my pipe for a cigar, and strolled after it along the stately wooded promenade of the Maiden Walk, and through the Damm Gate till we reached the public cemetery, which was like every other place of the same kind, with its headstones, slabs, and urns, crosses, flowers, wreaths of *immortelles*, and other sorrowful mementoes of those who are dead and gone.

The body—that of a child, apparently—was committed to the dust. The service was read by a Lutheran clergyman, who wore a long black silk cassock and a ruff of the middle

ages. The hired mourners were lighting their pipes in haste to be gone, and supposing there was nothing more to be seen, I, too, was turning away to quit the place, when I experienced something like an electric shock on beholding a man whose figure was but too familiar to me loitering near a tomb—Mynheer van Neukerque !

I shrank back with a wild beating of my heart, intending to watch him unseen, even at the risk of being locked for the night in the cemetery, the gates of which I knew would soon be closed.

He was dressed in a fashionable style, with an ordinary black paletot, a gray crush hat, and wore pale lavender gloves. He had a cigar in his mouth, and was reading, as I supposed, with apparent earnestness, the inscription on a newly-erected tomb. At last he raised his head, and without seeming to notice me, walked from the parterre of graves to a gravelled path, where a lady joined him—a tall and elegant woman, who was magnificently dressed.

She took his arm with an air of pretty coquettish impatience, and together they proceeded towards the gate.

She was not Clarice, for she was taller, darkhaired, and more showy in appearance ; but *who* was she with whom he was lingering here in a cemetery in the evening, and where was that other, of whom he had robbed me ?

A chill came over my heart, and I sprang to the tomb at which I had first observed him.

It was a plain pillar of gray granite, destitute of ornament or inscription, consequently mynheer of the unhealthy complexion could not have been reading, and it was very improbable that he was praying, as a man would not likely be so employed with a cigar in his mouth. A recent interment had taken place before the pillar. The turf had been newly laid, and on it there lay a wreath of white artificial flowers.

"Who is buried here?" thought I. "What can be the object of Neukerque in coming hither, and what is his apparent interest in this burial place?"

He might have asked exactly the same questions of me ;



but when I remembered the madness, the strange mania of which his brother was accused, and other strange stories, I am weak enough to confess that a gloomy fear, a great horror, crept over me.

"At all hazards I shall question him!" I exclaimed, and rushed after him just as the sixteen hired mourners were passing through the archway; but Mynheer van Neukerque and his attractive companion had already both reached the Damm Gate, and were lost amid the crowds that were now promenading on the Jungfernstieg.

Already the gas lamps were being lighted, and sending their long lines of tremulous radiance across the beautiful Binnen Alster, in the crystal depths of which the bridge and spire, the Pavilion café, the shops, the hotels, and even the crowded and gigantic Sporvie 'busses, which run on lines of rails, were all reflected downward as in a mirror.

A fear crept over me—a fear that the grave beside which I had stood in the vast cemetery outside the Damm Gate was that of her I had loved so well. Oh, had it indeed come to this, that she had died in a foreign land, without a friend, perhaps, beside her, without her hands in mine, and without the secret of her married life recorded!

Early next morning, when the Binnen Alster, and all the windows, church clocks, and spires of Hamburg were glittering in the rising sun, when the birds were carolling amid the trees of the Maiden Walk, and when the nurses and servant girls, in that pretty and modest dress which all that class wear in that city, were flitting to and fro about their morning work, I made my way to the place of interment to prosecute inquiries, and on passing the tomb and the little grave I had seen last night I trembled lest there should be signs that the solemn turf had been violated.

But the green sods were undisturbed. A blackbird was carolling sweetly close by, and the diamond dew lay heavy on the grass, the flowers, and the wreaths of *immortelles*.

On the grave of the little one some affectionate hand had already placed a chaplet of purple violets and camellias of snowy whiteness.

The recorder of the names of those who filled this gloomy place, a pleasant and polite old German, who had evidently been a soldier, informed me that the occupant of the grave which interested me was a *frau*—that is, a lady.

"A lady," I repeated.

"Yes, mein herr. A foreign lady, who died suddenly of some dangerous malady in a cottage some miles from this, on the Alster; and her body was brought here for a hasty interment by her husband, who seemed to love her so much that he would not trust the remains to the hired mourners alone, but came hither with them himself."

"What was he like?" I asked, with a sinking heart and a lowering brow.

"Tall, pale, and very gloomy in appearance; but then the herr was, of course, plunged in profound grief. He was at her grave yesterday."

"So lately?"

"Yes, mein herr, last evening."

"It must be *he*," I exclaimed. "His name—his name and hers!" I added, in accents which made the stolid old German open his gray eyes very wide, take the tasselled meerschaum from his moustached mouth, and stare at me.

"Mein herr is perhaps a relation?"

"No, none."

"Then whence this interest?"

"Her name, I tell you, old man, if you would not drive me mad?"

"She was named the Baroness Elandberg."

"Elandberg," said I, greatly relieved. "Oh, she was only a German, then."

"No, mein herr," replied the old recorder, smiling as if he fully appreciated my unintentional rudeness. "She and her husband were English people of title."

"But the name you have mentioned is not an English one—it sounds quite Dutch."

And in memory I reverted to the beautiful chain of mountains called the Elandberg, in Uitenhagen, where many a

time and oft I had brought down the white rhinoceros, the African buffalo, and the eland of the Cape colonists, by a single ball from those rifles of which Adrian Africander had robbed me.

The German shrugged his shoulders, and said that the name and title of the lady would be carved upon the stone next day in full, when mein herr could read them for himself if he chose.

All that day and most of the next I idled about Hamburg. I rambled to the fishing village of Blankenese, with its pretty and picturesque little houses scattered along the slope and among the trees, one over the other, row upon row. I took the Sporvie 'bus to Wandsbeck, which is in Prussia now, where I saw the observatory built by Tycho Brahé, and lunched on brawn and lager beer in a room that had once been the study of Clasidius, and got back to Hamburg just as the sun was setting.

A droschki soon set me down at the gate of the cemetery, where a carver, while whistling gaily a German waltz, was just giving the finishing touches with his chisel to the brief inscription on the tomb, and it ran simply thus :

"In memoriam sacram. C. H., the Baroness Elandberg. Died 25th of May 18—. Aged twenty-seven years."

And this was all.

"Clarice would now be nearly twenty-seven," thought I ; but as she and this Baroness could scarcely be one and the same person, I turned away in perplexity, pleased that one doubt had been removed from my mind, yet, nevertheless, determined to trace out Mynheer van Neukerque, and discover whether or not she was happy now. I owed this course, I thought, to the memory of her good old father, kind Toby Haywood, of Walcot Tower, to her sister, the heedless Fanny, to my friend Douglas, and, more than all, to herself ; and yet, while making this mental vow, I could not forget that she was another man's wife, with whom I had no just or legal right to interfere.

But now I remembered with a strange chill that which I had

not remarked particularly before—that Van Neukerque had round his crush hat a very unmistakable band of crape—that he was in half mourning for some one.

“C. H.” “What was her maiden name?” I asked of the recorder.

“I am sorry, mein herr, that I cannot tell you. It was thus given me, and ‘C. H.’ may stand for Carlotta Hortensia, Catherine Henrietta, or I know not what.”

“True—perhaps. I thank you. Good-morning.”

As I was walking slowly back to the Hôtel de l’Europe, seeking its back porch in the Hermanstrasse, a shout from several persons roused me from a reverie, and springing instinctively on one side, I narrowly escaped being ridden down by a horseman, who came dashing along the street at a most unwarrantable pace.

As I looked up at him I encountered the pale face, cold, gleaming eyes, and the firmly set mouth of Schencke van Neukerque, the very man I sought!

I called in haste to two Prussian gendarmes to seize him, and they drew their brass-hilted hangers to cut his bridle or capture him, not in obedience to me, as I spoke in English in my confusion, but with the intention of arresting him for furious riding. He spurred past them, however, and galloping on by the Bourse, disappeared beyond, in the densely-crowded Adolphsplatz.

Being a total stranger in Hamburg, I had no one to assist me, to advise me, or to confer with; but I felt an imperative obligation upon me to do something. With “the indefinable instinct of something yet to come,” and the strange conduct of this man, the very fact of his almost riding me down under the heels of his horse, and passing on without explanation or apology, seemed to warrant me afresh in tracking him out.

At all the hotels I inquired minutely whether a person named Neukerque had taken rooms or dined there; but no such man was known. At the *poste restante* I was informed by a remarkably sharp clerk that letters for a person so named had

been transmitted from thence to a place called Ependorf, nine miles from the city, but none had gone there since the 25th of May, as he would seem to have left that place.

The 25th of May—a strange coincidence ! It was the very date I had seen carved on the tombstone beside which Neukerque had been loitering, and from a cottage on the Alster had the dead lady been brought.

He was said to be a merchant ; but amid the roar of the Bourse, perhaps the most crowded and noisy in the world, from the upper balconies I scanned the sea of human faces in the court below with my lorgnette, but looked in vain for his. However, the theatres and other public places yet remained to me ; but should I be lucky enough to select the same time and place that he did ? More than all, might he not have left the city entirely, and thus render all my labour futile ?

If I met him, how should I address him, I asked of myself ? Of course, introducing myself as a stranger in that foreign city—as a former friend of his wife—as the friend of the Douglasses, from whom, by the way, I had not heard for months now, so unsettled were my habits, so erratic my movements—as one who had known his brother Schalk in the far Cape Colony. But here I must own that knowledge to have been more perplexing than pleasing.

And this man whose whereabouts was involved in so much mystery, who seemed to appear and disappear at will, who could not be traced, and whose name was quite unknown to the Prussian gendarmes that patrolled every street of Hamburg and Altona, was the man who had parted us for ever.

Oh, heaven ! were all the passionate kisses we had exchanged—all the vows we had uttered—all the vows and thoughts that were unuttered as being too deep for words—all the happy, happy hours of tender endearment, when hope was high and our hearts were young—all the long and silent love trances in which we had shared—times when the world itself seemed to stand still—were these each and all really gone for ever, and to be as nothing now ?

And an echo in my heart answered—

“ Nothing !”

Should I insult him—put a bullet into him at twelve paces ? We were free to act as foreigners on foreign ground.

But then came another reflection. He was not altogether to blame, and a duel might be the cause of sorrow, perhaps of disgrace to her ; so the thought was abandoned as soon as formed, and just as I drew in my chair at one of the boards of the *table d'hôte* in the stately Hôtel de l'Europe, where seldom less than two hundred sat daily down to dine at three P.M., a gentleman on my right hand, who had been intent on talking to a fair Swede beside him, turned to me abruptly exclaiming :

“ What, Haddon, are you here ? By Jove, how doocid strange that we should meet in Hamburg !”

## CHAPTER LI.

I TURNED with surprise to hear a familiar English voice amid the foreign Babel and guttural babble around me, and met the handsome Anglo-Saxon face, the nicely-parted hair, the bandolined moustache, and the perfect toilette, even to collar, cuffs, and studs, of Percival Graves, of the Coldstream Guards — the aide-de-camp whom I had seen on pretended sick leave enjoying the luxuries of Datetree Pen in Jamaica.

“ By Jove, how doocid odd we should meet here ; but doocid pleasant and jolly too. Glad to see you, old fellow !” he exclaimed, and we shook hands warmly, for my old silly jealousies of him when we were on the march to the Amatola mountains were all gone now, and here, by the Alster and the muddy Elbe, I hailed him quite as an old friend, and we began to converse as well as we might amid the buzz of tongues in every language, but chiefly Hamburg German, around us, together with the incessant interruptions consequent to a stream of waiters poking silver *entrée* dishes and so forth over one's left shoulder.

I was full of thought, my mind was ill at ease, I could not eat, and, sooth to say, German cookery is not very attractive ; hot water with a single pea in it being generally considered as soup.

“ So, Graves, you are on leave again ?” said I.

"No ; sold out—couldn't help it—made a bad book on the Derby and Oaks. I sent in my papers from Jamaica."

"Married—eh ?"

"Oh, no," said he, laughing ; "time enough for that sort of thing after I detect my first gray hair. Talking of fogies—heard anything of Douglas lately ?"

"Not since I saw his name in the *Gazette*."

"Among the bankrupts—eh ?"

"No ; something better than that—as brevet-major."

"Glad to hear of it. That is my bottle of moselle. Will you join me ?"

"Thanks !"

"How jolly strange it is that they give you potatoes here at breakfast, just as is done in Norway and Denmark, and that fish always forms the second course at dinner after the meat. And look at those German fellows, how they square their elbows and poke them into each other at table ; and the women, how they grasp their forks like daggers, by Jove ! Ah, no one comports herself so exquisitely at table as a genuine English lady."

"But what are you doing in Hamburg ?" I asked.

"Nothing. And you ?"

"Nothing also—that is, as yet."

"I came here from Berlin, *en route* for London, and don't know whether to take railway for Ostend, or a steamer from the Elbe to the Thames direct."

"Do you put up at the Europe ?"

"Yes ; second *étage*."

"Stay with me for a day or two. I have a little matter on hand that, once discussed, I may return with you."

"With pleasure. I'm your man ; but it is a stupid place this Hamburg—stupid to a Londoner, at least—and I wonder I have loitered here so long."

"It seems gay enough," said I.

"Gay—a little ; and don't the women of all ranks and classes leer at the men ? No male biped escapes them. It is the most dissipated hole in the world—beats Paris and London all to nothing. But when you have been at the Circus Renz

Smidt's Tivoli Gardens, the theatre, the Elbe and Schweitzer Pavilions, had a glance at the countess in her carriage, as she bowls along the Maiden Walk or the Neuer Wall, there is nothing more to be seen, and nothing more to be done but to strap your portmanteau, woll up your wugs, and be off."

I could not help smiling at his pronunciation of rolling up one's rugs.

"But this countess—who is she?" I inquired.

"How long have you been in Hamburg?"

"About a week."

"And have not yet seen the countess?"

"No; I am a stranger here."

"So am I, for the matter of that," said Graves; "but she was soon pointed out to me. She is a very handsome and wealthy woman, this Kathi Countess of Klampenborg, and leads the fashion among a certain—perhaps I should rather say uncertain—set here. She is the observed of all observers, at the theatre, opera, Schweitzer's Pavilion, and even at St. Michael's Church, where her equipage draws up at the porch every Sunday. By the way, you should see that church. Its spire is the loftiest in Europe, being one hundred feet higher than the dome of St. Paul's in London."

"And this countess?"

"Oh, her character won't brook much handling. Who she was nobody knows. She was married to one of the richest Jews in Hamburg, who to please her bought a countship somewhere, and then died, leaving her his title, and what was better, his tin; and since then she has been going the pace most rapidly. But as for St. Michael's Church—"

"I have other work on hand than sight-seeing," said I impatiently.

"Have you weally now? I thought you said that you had nothing to do."

"And nothing was absolutely my object until a day ago, when—"

"You fell in with some pretty face—put a monkey on it you did!" he cried, laughing.



"No, Graves ; I had a very singular rencontre."

"With whom?"

"Mynheer van Neukerque, who married Miss Haywood."

"Are they here?"

"He, at least, is here. As for her—"

"Now that you speak of it, it seems like a dream to me that I have seen him somewhere. Poor girl—poor Clarice Haywood ! I was awfully spoony on her once, and she almost jilted me to marry that horrid Dutch fellow."

"He saved her life, it seems?" said I gloomily.

"Certainly. It was pluckily and deuced well done, for I saw it. But where is she now if not with him?"

"I have a gnawing curiosity to ask—ay, to force him to say—if I meet him ; but I have no legal title to do so."

"Nor I ; but I'll swear we are cousins, or something of that sort."

I then told Graves all about the tomb near which I had seen him lingering, and the interest he seemed to take in it, of the initials and inscription, the date of which so closely tallied with that up to which letters had been forwarded to him at Ependorf—the same Ependorf from whence the dead baroness was said to have been brought ; and after he heard me, my companion became lost in a maze of conjecture.

"Can she be buried there?" he asked, in a low voice.

"If so, whence this title of baroness?"

"In a burying ground ; and it was there you saw him?" he exclaimed.

"Yes ; the great cemetery outside the Damm Gate—the Kensal-green of Hamburg."

"How doocid odd," said Graves ponderingly.

"And seeing him there waked some memories of my Cape adventures that were odd indeed, and gave rise to the darkest suspicions."

"He must have a fancy for gloomy objects," said Graves, "for it was in a cemetery that I recognised him at Rome."

"When was this?"

"Six months ago—him to a certainty. I turned out with

other sightseers in the Piazza d'España to see the military funeral of a colonel of one of the French regiments. It took place after dusk, and was a most imposing spectacle. First a hundred Roman boys attired in pink and white, followed by twice that number of monks, all chanting and carrying lighted candles four feet in length. Then came the priests in their robes around a gigantic crucifix, the coffin covered by a pall of black and yellow satin, with six field officers on each side; two regimental bands followed with muffled drums; the infantry, with arms reversed, followed the friends of the deceased, and among those who stood by the grave in a mourning cloak was this man, Neukerque, whom no one present seemed to know. What the dooce does it all mean? At Ependorf, he would be sure to have been known by his own name."

"Yes; so say the postal officials."

"Well, let us look up some of the public mourners—they may elucidate the affair."

"An excellent idea, Graves, for which I thank you. I did not think of it before."

"But we must wait until to-morrow."

"Well, here come the candles."

"And there go the ladies like a covey of partridges."

For, as is usual at the dinner table of all German and North European hotels, the waiters entered with lighted candles when the cloth was removed, as smoking was to begin. So we all rose and turned towards the doors as the ladies bowed and withdrew.

An old Prussian major, of Scottish descent, Helmuth von Gordon, of the 75th Regiment, who dined daily at the *table d'hôte*, finding that we had both served, now joined in our conversation, when I did not wish to have it interrupted by "shop" *à la Prusse*, till he went to sleep over his simple tankard of lager beer, wearied after a long argument on that system, the advantage of which no foreigner or English civilian can see or understand—purchase in our army. Yet the old soldier was something more than a soldier, for he:

could talk of German literature and art, and appreciate the beauties of Mozart and Mendelssohn, Haydn and Handel.

We shall have more of the major anon, for we met and parted daily "with that sort of mutual liking that is so pleasant to take up, so easy to lay down, and yet might become friendship if it had time to ripen."

I now ordered more sparkling moselle. Graves and I exchanged our cigar cases, rehearsed our plans and measures to unravel the mystery in the movements of Mynheer van Neukerque, and we hoped to do so easily and clearly on the morrow.

However, the mystery was to be a little increased ere the night was passed.

As the darkness closed in we proposed to go somewhere. Graves suggested the Schweitzer Pavilion, or the Altona Casino, where *wohl cartes* were given to the prettiest girls alone, and where the wine was unexceptionable ; but I was in no mood for dancing, and bluntly declined to go to either place, though the former was fashionable, and required visitors to be in full dress.

The theatre and opera were shut, so we ordered the hotel porter to summon a droschki, and, in the hope that we might light upon our Dutch acquaintance in some public place, drove to the Renz Circus—a large and beautiful arena for horsemanship and acrobatic feats, with an ample stage for theatrical representations, and a magnificent orchestra, which played during the night the finest airs from *Faust* and *Norma*, varied by those rubbishy measures that suited the action of the horse, when the pretty Swede, Fru Tibell, flew through the hoops or over the banners at full speed, or caracoled among the sawdust as a very killing Polish lancer.

But to our great delight the English riders and clowns bore away the palm from all the foreigners, and though our Crown Princess is to be the future Empress of Germany, our satisfaction in this small national triumph did not seem to be shared by Major von Gordon and a score or so of officers of the 75th and 76th line regiments, who were all grouped to-

gether in one place in the first *parquet*, and were—it seemed odd to our eyes—all in their undress uniform, with blue sur-touts, forage caps, and their straight spring-shell swords slung through a hole in the left skirt—swords of the fashion worn by the British at Fontenoy.

We soon wearied of this place, and were returning through the spacious, finely-lit, and crowded streets to our hotel, when the shrill blowing of police whistles, and the hurrying to and fro of the Prussian gendarmes, announced that a conflagration was seen in some part of the city by the fire watch, which nightly occupy the great spire of St. Michael, from whence the whole of Hamburg, with the Elbe, the Alster, and the Billewinding through, may be seen like a glittering map four hundred and fifty-sixty feet below.

The fire was of no interest to us, and having no desire to be jostled by a crowd, or robbed by those roughs with whom the city abounds, we proceeded towards our hotel, till at the corner of the Hohe Bleichen we found the street almost impassible, as a block of carriages, droschkis, and carts had taken place, consequent on the passage of a gigantic fire engine on the iron tramway.

“Look, Haddon—the countess, by Jove!” exclaimed Graves, as a magnificent carriage, lined with white satin, the panels gorgeous with coats of arms, a row of embossed coronets round the roof, the harness of a pair of beautiful grays shining with plate ornaments, the liveries of the driver and valet, and the uniform—if we may so degrade the word—of the handsome courier who shared the rumble with the latter—a cocked hat, plume, epaulettes, belt, and sabre worthy those of a Russian field-marshal, all came slowly past pressing towards the Königstrasse.

By the blaze of the street gas and the light of the silver carriage lamps I saw within it a beautiful woman in full dress, her bare neck, arms, and shoulders all perfect in form as those of Giulia Grisi when Grisi was in the bloom of her youth.

Her face was fine in profile, though her nose approached

the Roman type ; her eyes were dark, like her hair, but sparkling and clear ; her lips were finely cut, yet with the form of her jaw it expressed I know not what—a firmness that bordered on cruelty. She gave me the idea of woman who could be both loving and pitiless, and whom it might be perilous work to offend.

Bold she looked, and confident, and highbred ; her delicate ears and the wreaths of real and artificial hair which were coiled round her superb head sparkling with diamonds and opals.

“Is that lady the Countess of Klampenborg?” I asked grasping the arm of Graves so tightly that he winced.

“Yes. Is she not beautiful?”

“’Tis she I saw with Van Neukerque in the cemetery ; and there, by heaven, is Neukerque himself !” I exclaimed, as one of the white satin curtains was withdrawn, and I saw the pale and hairless visage, the cold eyes, and calm, collected features of that remarkable personage seated opposite to her in full evening costume. They were evidently on the way to some *roué* together.

Inspired by a desire to do something, I know not what, I was pushing forward to the carriage steps and window, when a burly Prussian gendarme, with his drawn hanger in one hand and his brass whistle in the other, very unceremoniously pushed me back, while a passage was made for an equipage so imposing ; and with all its bright panels, embossings, and plated harness flashing in the gas-light, and the courier’s tall green cocks’ tails fluttering in the wind, it vanished down the Königstrasse, near the house in which Klopstock, the poet, died.

“I shall force that woman to tell where to find him?” I exclaimed. “Those are the couple I saw in the cemetery, and that fellow is Van Neukerque beyond all doubt.”

“I, too, saw him plainly.”

“You are wrong, meine herren,” said a voice close by us. “Pardon me for saying so ; but the name you mention is not that of the gentleman who is said to be the prime favourite—

indeed, as some will have it, the intended—of the beautiful countess.”

On turning, we found it was the old Scoto-Prussian, Major Helmuth von Gordon, our casual friend of the *table d'hôte*, who spoke.

“That gentleman,” he continued, “is a Dutch Baron Elandberg, from the Cape of Good Hope, which the English so wrongfully retain from his countrymen. He takes his title from a range of mountains there, his own property, I believe.”

“Herr Major, there is some mistake in all this,” said I.

“How so?”

“I know the mountains you name, and have shot all over them. They are seventy miles long.”

“Well, what of that?” said the major coldly. “He received his title from the Queen of Britain as a reward for his services in the Caffre war, and those of his brother, who was killed in action at the head of a regiment of the Bergschotten—what you call Highlanders.”

“O, by Jove!” exclaimed Graves; “but this is delicious.”

“Well, herr major, this is the first we have ever heard of those services, or the baron either, and we both had the honour to serve in that war under Major-General Somerset.”

“At the Hôtel de l'Europe I read it in the newspapers.”

“Where very likely he inserted the notices himself,” said Graves, who had lost much of his Dundrearyism and West-end foppishness.

The major shrugged his shoulders, and made his silver epaulettes glitter, saying simply, but significantly, as he twisted his wiry gray moustache :

“I tell you but the common rumour, mein herr. However, as the countess of Klampenborg is pretty reckless of her own character, or quite able to take care of it, I never care much for that of her friends.”

He then bowed, and placing two fingers of the right hand to the peak of his glazed leather helmet, which was adorned

with the Prussian eagle and a spike—which, by the way, is also a ventilator—in silver plate, passed on.

"A peppery old customer," said Graves. "He retains some of the old Highland blood as well as the name of Gordon."

If, as there cannot be a doubt, Van Neukerque is the Baron Elandberg, who, in the name of heaven, is this dead baroness?" I exclaimed.

"To-morrow may discover."

"To-morrow for Ependbrf," I added as I took his arm, and we hurried through the handsome Rathhausmarkt to reach the Hôtel de l'Europe.

## CHAPTER LII.

"We will beg this incredulous half-countryman of ours to accompany us," said I, as we sat at breakfast in the great parlour of the hotel, the four tall windows of which looked out on the Neuer Jungfernstieg, with its double row of linden trees.

"Who? Von Gordon?"

"Yes."

"Not a bad idea. The epaulette is all-powerful here; and here he comes in all his war paint, buckled and belted for morning parade."

The sturdy major, who had breakfasted at a corner table on steak and potatoes, with a glass tankard of lager beer, approached and bade us good morning, when we explained briefly the errand we had in view, and requested the pleasure of his company and advice; but he looked doubtful for a moment, and said—

"Meine herren, the work you have in hand—the discovery, it may be the unmasking, of a foreign impostor—is that of a police magistrate and the gendarmes."

"You mistake us, herr major," said I. "We simply ask you to accompany us as a friend, to aid us with your advice and the influence of your presence."

"I have merely to see the guard changed at the military post in the Admiralitatstrasse, and shall be back in time; but when do you start for Ependorf?"

"Whenever you return, herr major."

"Agreed. I shall be back in an hour. We have a brigade day at Altona to-morrow, and to-day I am an idler, fortunately."

He applied two fingers to the peak of his helmet, chucked his sword in that adroit way peculiar to Prussian officers through the orifice of his left skirt, and withdrew on foot, for somehow, whether on duty or not, we never had the luck to see the worthy major mounted, and had grave doubts whether he ever indulged in equestrian exercise.

While loitering in the recess of the hotel window, watching the crowds of little boys and girls going to school, all alike carrying their books in a tiny Prussian knapsack, strapped in military fashion to the back, and their dinner in a tin canteen slung in the same fashion over the left shoulder; the mobs of city pedestrians hurrying to and fro; the tiny steamers starting every ten minutes from the lower gallery of the Alster Pavilion; the gigantic *Sporvie* 'busses, gliding noiselessly along, save for the bells that jingle so merrily from the collars and girths of their horses—while watching these and other things, we saw one of the sixteen hired mourners, in his quaint sable costume, with long, slender rapier, thick, high ruff, and black mantle, obtaining a match from the hotel porter with which to light his *meerschaum*, and resolving at once to question him, we had him summoned to my room.

A dark, sombre fellow, with a hooked nose, and quick, gleaming eyes, a pale face, in his shabby and absurd official costume, he looked like a half-starved actor about to perform *Hamlet* or some such character part, in a country booth.

"You are one of the public mourners?" said I suavely, to introduce the matter in hand.

"Ya, mein herr."

"Be seated, please."

"Ya; I thank you."

"May I ask your name?"

"Certainly, mein herr; but I may not give it."

"Well, perhaps it is of no consequence," said I, in my intense anxiety willing to pass over this incivility.



"I have no reason to conceal it," said he, after a pause. "I am Lauritz Balchen, senior member of the honourable fraternity of the Reiten-Deiner, buryers of the dead, and body-guard to the magistrates of Hamburg."

He said this slowly, emphatically, and with an air of perplexity, as if he wondered whither all these questions tended.

"If you have any one to inter, mein herr," said he, after a pause, "and have the requisite certificates and credentials that the deceased came lawfully by his or her death—"

"Fortunately, we have no such sorrowful duty for you to perform."

"It would be a pleasure to us, mein herr," said he.

"I have no doubt of it, Herr Balchen ; though I know not whether you refer to burying the dead or pocketing the fees therefor. But I have a question to ask of you concerning a certain interment—"

"I do not like answering such questions, mein herr, unless they are asked by one in authority. Thus you must excuse me," said he, rising, and brushing the nap of his shabby, steeple-crowned hat.

"And you also must excuse me," I continued, but still suavely, for I felt how much depended on the information one of these men could afford me ; "and if your wife would like the richest dress—"

"I have no wife," said he sulkily. "I have buried two, and very creditably, with all the fraternity in new mourning ruffs and bands."

"Well, anyway, these are at your service if you will oblige me," said I, while deftly slipping into his hand four or five kassengelds—large silver pieces, each worth three-quarters of a dollar.

On this his whole manner changed. He bowed profoundly, and in the glitter of his beady eyes, and the increased arch of his hooked nostril, we saw that the avaricious blood of Judea mingled with that of the scarcely less greedy German in his veins.

"Now, I think we shall understand each other," said I.

"Ya, ya. This is the language all men understand, mein herr," he replied with a knowing wink, while depositing the coins in the pocket of his trunk breeches.

"The information I seek from you is simply this—and if you do not yield it, some other member of your honourable fraternity will probably do so ; if not there is a final appeal to the magistrates—"

"I trust that no such appeal may be necessary."

"Do you remember conducting the funeral of a lady who died at a cottage on the bank of the Alster about the 25th of May last?"

"The 25th of May," he repeated after me, as if to gain time for reflection.

"This is September—little more than four months ago. You cannot have forgotten if you were then one of the hired mourners."

"I have been one for fifteen years, mein herr."

"Well?"

"I have not forgotten. It was from the village of Ependorf we brought the body" (how the word thrilled me), "from the house of Ulrik Rosing."

"Could you point out that house?"

He paused and scratched his chin, as if his memory wanted refreshing.

"Think," said I, slipping a double mark into his hand.

"Oh, ya, herr graf," said he ; "I remember it quite well. The Alster washes the wall below the window of the room in which the dead body lay."

I cannot describe how words of this kind, said so coolly and so casually, made me wince.

"I am pleased that you can remember," I replied. "And here comes Major the Herr von Gordon, who is to accompany us. Please to call a droschki and go with us to Ependorf, and I shall make the little trip well worth your while."

As the major entered, with an apology for being late—though we had not thought so—the face of Lauritz Balchen grew rather pale, for the Prussian uniform has an unpleasant effect to the eye of a Hamburger.

"Mein herr," said he, "whom do you seek at Ependorf?"

"I scarcely know—whether the living or the dead," said I, replying to my own thoughts rather than his question.

"My general business is with the dead," said he dryly.

"So may be mine to-day, alas!"

Balchen seemed perplexed, and looked with a fidgety expression at the major, who eyed him with cool disdain.

"Has a murder been committed, herr graf?" he asked nervously, in a whisper.

"Good heavens! do not ask me!" I exclaimed.

"Does this fellow go with us to Ependorf?" asked Von Gordon.

"Yes, with your permission, herr major, as his presence is necessary."

"Well, so be it; a droschki is at the door. Let him sit beside the driver; and now, my friends, I am at your disposal."

A few moments after saw us clear of Hamburg and Altona that old-fashioned and picturesque town. Ere long the tall spires rising amid soft haze, and cradled in the golden sunshine of noon, the sharp, ridgy roofs, numerous as the waves of the sea, the pointed gables, the countless storehouses and dwellings, composed of plaster, brick, and timber, though founded on basements of granite, the thousands of weather-worn wharves, and all the shipping, which make the boastful citizens say, "for commerce Hamburgh, and then London"—each and all were left behind, and we were driving through a fertile country, flat and green as a billiard table, save where it rose in gentle slopes covered with wood, interspersed with the white-walled villas and gaudy flower gardens belonging to opulent citizens.

None of us spoke much, the major was naturally taciturn, and Graves, influenced by what he now knew of the story of Clarice and myself, had lost, or relinquished, much of his thoughtless manner, and smoked his cheroot in silence.

Our hackney drove us along the left bank of the Alster, a river which rises at Stormar in Holstein, and flows into the

Elbe at Hamburg, after filling those two magnificent basins known as the Binnen and Outer Alster Lakes.

I felt a strange glow in my heart during this short journey and inwardly thanked heaven for leading my wandering steps to Hamburg for the purpose apparently of elucidating a dark mystery, or perhaps avenging a secret crime.

On we drove. My mind was completely turned inward, and I heard but heeded not the major as he pointed out the tomb of the aged Klopstock, the monument erected to the eleven hundred and more Hamburgers who fell in the famous siege of 1813, the house once occupied by the fugitive Dumouriez, and once by the memorialist Bourrienne, the low plains and the blue hills of Hanover in the distance.

### CHAPTER LIII.

A DRIVE of nine miles' length brought us to Ependorf, a quaint little village, principally built of timber and brick, the cottage walls being painted brilliantly white, the roofs of red tile, with numerous pale green willow and linden trees drooping over them, especially those by the side of the Alster.

Over all these towered the usual feature in a Danish landscape, the revolving sails of a huge windmill, in the lower story or basement of which the miller resided with all his family, for the tower was full of windows.

Lauritz Balchen conducted us straight to the dwelling of Ulrik Rosing, a large and handsome cottage, and a comfortable one withal, as Ulrik was a miller and possessed some property in the neighbourhood.

It was two-storied, with quaint dormer windows on its steep roof; its casements were formed of grotesquely fashioned iron work, filled in with small pieces of glass. It was almost smothered under masses of green ivy, hops, and flowering jasmine, amid which innumerable sparrows and linnets found a home; and a huge crane, whose nest was in one of the gables, perched on the apex of the roof, was eyeing us with evident curiosity as we drew up to the gate of the pretty little garden plot which lay between the road and the front porch.

On the other side, as already related, it was situated so close to the Alster that the current of the river washed its wall.

Whitened with flour, Ulrik the miller and Gretchen his wife, a pretty and rosy-looking woman about thirty years of age, made their appearance at the door, round which the roses clambered and many a birdcage hung. They looked at us with surprise, even alarm, for visitors in a droschki were evidently an unusual circumstance with them.

I had but one idea prevailing in my mind.

On that pretty village, with its mills, picturesque cottages, and linden trees, on the river's flowing current, on that humble dwelling of Ulrik Rosing, with its flowers and willows, must the eyes of her I loved so well have rested often. It was the last scene she had looked upon in this world, and the place was rapidly acquiring a mournful interest to me.

As we approached the door the eyes of the miller—heedless of three of us—were chiefly fixed on the major, whom he immediately saluted in the orthodox German military fashion, by applying two fingers to the peak of his cap, while his clear blue eyes sparkled, and a flush was visible in his cheeks through the coating of flour that whitened them.

"Welcome to Ependorf, herr major," said he.

"I thank you, for we have a few grave questions to ask of you," replied the officer.

"What! don't you remember me, herr major?" exclaimed the miller, colouring more deeply.

"I can't say that I do," replied the officer haughtily. "I hope I don't owe you anything."

"If you did, it would not make much difference between us."

"Indeed!"

"No, herr major."

"You are an odd fellow."

"Have you forgotten Ulrik Rosing, the grenadier of the old 75th, who carried you on his back from under the Danish guns at Düppel, and who was with you at the Danesmark?"

"Gott in himmel! and so it is Ulrik Rosing sure enough!" exclaimed the major. "Well, old comrade, and how has the world gone with you since you left the old 75th?"

"Well indeed, thank heaven. This is my house, herr major, there is my mill, and there is my little wife, Gretchen, who is all the world to me, and who nearly broke her heart when I left school to become a soldier in the Danish war, for we loved each other even as children."

Gretchen curtsayed, and coloured with pleasure when the major drew off his leather glove and shook her hand.

"I hope, Gretchen, you keep a tight hand over him, for when Ulrik was in my company of grenadiers he was a wild devil, I can tell you. Well, Ulrik, that was ten years ago. I was a captain then, and I am only a major now, when my moustache is whiter by time than thine is with flour."

We were all by this time seated within the cottage, and Gretchen was bustling about in her cupboard, and setting before us some cakes of her own preparation, with a flask of corn brandy and certain bottles of lager beer.

"You said, herr major, that you had some questions to ask of me," said the miller, who, impressed by the sight of the silver epaulettes, and the once familiar uniform, did not venture to seat himself, but stood very erect before the major. "If it is a contract to supply the brigade at Altona with flour—"

"I have come on no such errand, Ulrik. It is these gentlemen who have the questions to ask—the Herr Haddon and Herr Graves, both of whom have served, and like ourselves been soldiers."

"They are the more welcome to my poor house for that," said the miller, bowing to us both, and then regarding Lauritz Balchen with a puzzled expression.

"Do you remember the residence here of a lady who died in your house?" I asked.

"Perfectly. Her residence here was so recent," replied the miller, while Gretchen his wife became suddenly interested, and stepped forward to listen.

"How long were they with you—she and her husband?"

"From the beginning of April till the 25th of May, when the poor lady died."

"And you—you remember her funeral?"

"Of course, mein herr. At least, I remember her husband coming hither and taking away the body. I saw the face of this gentleman on that occasion," he added, turning to Lauritz Balchen, who said :

"True ; I was here that day with the rest of the hired mourners."

"They were English people?" queried the major after a pause.

"English, apparently, but with a Dutch name."

"And they called themselves the Baron and Baroness Elandberg?"

"Nay, mein herr," rejoined the ex-grenadier, with surprise ; "they called themselves simply Van Neukerque."

"What was the lady's ailment?"

"I cannot say, herr major."

"She had a doctor of course."

"Not exactly ; but the Herr van Neukerque brought her some draughts and simples from Moses Adderfang, a kind of doctor who lives in the vicinity of the Stubberneuk."

"Moses Adderfang—a Jew—the most infamous quack in Hamburg !" exclaimed the major angrily. "I have heard of him before, and so I doubt not have the police."

"This person, Van Neukerque, was a tall, pale man?" said I.

"Yes, mein herr, a tall, pale man, with a large black beard and curling moustache."

"Excuse me, but are you sure of these details?—for when I saw him yesterday he was, as usual, shaven from chin to eye."

"But a razor would effect these changes," suggested Graves, who had hitherto been silent.

"True," added the major ; "and we must have him shut up till his beard grows, and the likeness is restored."

"Is he still in this country?" asked the miller Rosing with surprise ; "for he spoke of instantly departing for Holland or England."

"How came they to reside here at all, Ulrik?"

"For the benefit of the lady's health. I was told that she was sick and ailing, poor thing."

"And you know not of what she died?" asked Graves, for my voice was failing me.

"Alas ! no, mein herr."

"Unless it was of that ailment which few men believe in—a broken heart," said the plump dame Gretchen, striking suddenly into our conversation. "Yes, mein herr, if ever woman died of that sickness of the soul, it was the unhappy Frau Neukerque."

"Heavens ! do you say so?" exclaimed the major. "Explain yourself, Gretchen."

"Her husband was a horrible fellow, who treated her cruelly, with cutting coldness, contempt, and neglect, because—as she told me with tears, when one day her poor, aching head reclined on my shoulder—he had spent all her fortune at Rome, Naples, and elsewhere, and she had nothing more in the world ; and that her sister, her only living relation—the only being in the world who loved her—was far, far away. Oh, how different they seemed from my Ulrik and me, for we loved one another, and we married for the love that is yet in our hearts. The Herr van Neukerque was all day long, and often all the night, in the city, and only came hither apparently to scowl upon and sneer at the poor lady, though she seemed to be blighted, blasted, and slowly passing away—the very end to which, no doubt, he looked forward. And times there were, when Ulrik was at the mill, when I heard sad and terrible things said to the poor lady."

"Take heed what you say, Gretchen, mein liebe," said the miller, who saw that I was much affected by these details. "Remember what the pastor told us on Sunday, 'he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow.'"

"Halt, Ulrik, and let your wife alone," said the major. "Tell us, Gretchen, what were those sad and terrible things?"

"Oh, mein herr, I mean such monstrous pieces of unkindness as my Ulrik would rather die than do or say to me."

"Never mind Ulrik," said the major testily. "To the point, Gretchen, to the point."



"Once I heard her say in a moaning voice, with her poor head between two thin white hands :

" ' Oh, what a luxury it would be to die !' "

" ' Would it ?' sneered her husband.

" ' Oh, yes ; to be at everlasting peace. Yet I cannot take away my own life.' "

" ' It may be taken for you !' "

" ' Did he dare to say so to her face ?' " asked Von Gordon, grasping my arm as I made an involuntary start.

" ' Yes, mein herr ; I am an honest woman, and tell you the truth. On another occasion, one of too many such, I heard her say—

" ' Oh, Schencke, have you no pity, no remorse for all the misery and poverty you have brought upon me ?' "

" ' ' None,' he replied, hard as flint ; ' remorse is a word for a child.' "

" ' But you are guilty of—of crimes, and repent them not.' "

" ' If you call gambling and signing another man's name in lieu of my own crimes, then I am guilty.' "

" ' And you do not regret them ?' "

" ' Because they are unpunished ; and who but a fool would regret an unpunished crime ?' "

" ' Here, then, we have an inkling of swindling and forgery,' said the major, turning to me.

" ' All these things set me thinking and wondering, and fearing too, mein herr,' " resumed the miller's wife. " ' I longed to be rid of such boarders, and felt no way indebted to the Countess of Klampenborg, who brought them hither ; but I pitied the unhappy lady. At last she fell seriously ill, and died suddenly—died in that very bed,' " she added, pointing to a little closet or chamber, the door of which stood open.

" ' In this bed !' " said I, in a hoarse whisper, for I was deeply agitated, and stepped into the tiny room.

The presence of Clarice seemed to pervade the place—to hover about the couch. I touched the pillows tenderly, and glanced round the humble walls and ceiling, on which her eyes must have rested for the last time ; and at the little open

casement, through which the perfume of the roses and the murmur of the Alster came together.

"And this," thought I, "was the chamber of death." —

I could almost imagine—so morbid had my feelings become—that the outline of a coffin could be traced on the white coverlet still.

"Has no relic been left of her?" I asked.

"None."

"Not even a ribbon—a glove—a letter?"

"Nothing. The Herr van Neukerque took away or destroyed everything. Not a trace of her has been left here."

"And he has interred her under another name. In all these proceedings there is some strange mystery," said Von Gordon sternly.

"There was no name on the coffin plate; to that I can swear, for the omission attracted my attention at the time," said Lauritz Balchen. "It was a coffin brought by the herr himself from one of the ready-made shops in the alleys off the Stubberneuk. I know the kind of man well enough."

"It was brought by a boat up the Alster, and taken in at the bedroom window," said Ulrik Rosing.

"And when our part of the business came, the lady was in it, and the lid screwed down," added Lauritz Balchen.

"A terrible burst of remorse and repentance seemed to come upon the Herr Neukerque," said Gretchen. "He would permit no one, not even me, to touch the body, or see it after death. He remained shut up with it in the room, and after it was removed he came hither no more."

"True," added Lauritz Balchen; "and his grief was so profound that he accompanied it to the grave in the public cemetery. He paid us all nobly, and after having her name duly recorded—though what that record was I never thought of inquiring—he went away with the air of a man who was about to drown himself in the Elbe."

"He seemed calm enough on the day I saw him smoking his cigar by the tomb, and the Countess of Klampenborg was there too," said I.

"And it was the countess who brought those people hither, Gretchen?" asked the major.

"Yes, mein herr, in her own carriage. The whole village turned out to see it."

"I shall see the burgomaster about this business. Meanwhile, another glass of your beer, Ulrik, and then we shall march. Drink with me, old comrade."

"To you and the old 75th, herr major."

"To the old 75th, and you, Ulrik."

And it was pleasant to see the old comrades clink their glasses, while their eyes lit up with the memory of other days, as they drained their jugs of German beer.

I begged the worthy Dame Gretchen to accept of a ring, which I drew from my finger, as a small reward for her kindness to Clarice; and promising to visit her again, we left the cottage, and a few minutes more saw us driving back to Hamburg, between broad green meadows, bordered by stately oak trees, in the bright sunshine, which seemed strange to me, amid the blackness and gloom of my own heart, in which had now gathered, gradually and surely, the dread, the horror, that Clarice had perished the victim of some foul play.

Major von Gordon seemed to read my thoughts in my eye.

"Patience yet awhile, my friend," said he. "Our next step is to discover this Dr. Moses Adderfang, who in Hamburg enjoys the reputation of being a conjuror as well as a quack; and then we shall set the police on the track of the Herr Baron Elandberg."

#### CHAPTER LIV.

WHAT a sorrowful story of all these affairs would I have to write to Gerard Douglas, who was still on the staff at Jamaica. Fanny would have to abandon her gaiety for a time; and then I thought how strange was destiny, how unjust fate! That she, the most heedless and unthinking, should have been twice married—and married each time happily—while poor Clarice, the most sensible and sensitive, she who had so much heart and gentleness in her disposition, should have been re-

served for a fate so miserable and mysterious, so terrible, and too probably so tragic.

Her grave ! I would visit it once again before leaving this hateful Hamburg never to return, and have the flowers which I know she loved best when at Walcot in the old time planted round it. But when that mute act of homage was performed, I had a sterner duty before me—to come face to face with this Schencke van Neukerque.

The long and protracted dinner at the *table d'hôte* was over as usual, and lights were beginning to twinkle on the waters of the Alster Lake ere the desert was cleared away.

"To-morrow," said the major, as he drew a candle towards him and lit his pipe, "I shall be with my regiment at Altona ; so to-night, gentlemen, if you choose, we will look up this respectable medical practitioner—this Doctor Moses Adderfang."

"Choose ! How could I else but choose it ?" said I ; "with gratitude to you, herr major !"

"Have you pistols ?" he asked, lowering his voice.

"Yes ; a brace of six-barrelled revolvers. Graves has pistols too."

"Good, then bring them ; my sword will do for me."

"Will weapons be necessary ?"

"Well, in the part of Hamburg we are about to visit—by night, too—one never knows what may happen, or whom we may meet."

"By Jove, a row, perhaps !" said Graves, his face brightening at the prospect of a little excitement of any kind.

We carefully loaded our pistols, slung them in our belts, and buttoned our coats over them, and under the guidance of Von Gordon set forth.

Once or twice the major had to inquire the way, and would have received but brief and surly rejoinders but for the occasional opening of his blue coat, which revealed the Prussian uniform below.

At last we found ourselves in a species of *cul-de-sac*, composed entirely of old timber-fronted houses ; some of which

were inhabited, as the feeble rays of light that flickered through their broken casements seemed to indicate—casements in some instances patched with paper and stuffed with rags or straw. Other houses were in partial ruin, and abandoned to rats and homeless beggars.

At the lower end of this alley towered a house of brick, having three elaborate wooden gables. By a broad flight of three steps we ascended to a massive arched doorway, furnished with a ponderous iron knocker.

"This is the billet of the fellow we are in search of," said the major, as he applied his hand to the great ring of the antique knocker, the echoes of which resounded hollowly within the house and all around.

A light flitted about from casement to casement of the house, and then one long ray shone brightly out through the great keyhole. We heard a heavy bolt withdrawn, and the door was opened, but still secured by a chain, to permit the servant, a damsel of decidedly Jewish type, to reconnoitre us.

"Say that the gentlemen wish to confer with Doctor Adderfang," said the major haughtily. "Is he at home?"

"Ya, mein herr, he is in his study," replied the girl, who undid the chain, and ushered us into what had once been a stately vestibule or hall, now sorely dilapidated and blackened by damp and time.

We were ushered into a handsome, spacious, and well-furnished apartment, lit by a large table-lamp—a bronze Atlas, supporting on his back a globe of light. One of those great stoves peculiar to Hamburg and the north of Europe, an iron column or cylinder some two feet in diameter, and reaching from the floor to the ceiling, gave warmth from one corner. In another stood a kind of altar covered by a cloth, on which were painted mystical characters not unlike those we see on tea-chests, together with dragons and Japanese-looking monsters.

On a tripod of carved and painted wood—a tripod of three entwined figures, so grotesque and uncouth in form as to be beyond all description—a human skull and cross-bones were

placed, and on each side of them stood three candles of yellow wax unlighted.

On three sides of the room were lofty cases of shelves, well filled with ponderous folios and quartos, bound in old dark brown calf, or fine white Roman covers with scarlet edges; and at a writing table, which was littered with books, papers, pencils, and compasses, half-drawn horoscopes, phials, and innumerable other things, sat Doctor Moses Adderfang, in a comfortable dressing-gown of soft shawl pattern, girt about him by a silk cord and tassels. His face was pale—colourless, in fact—and he was decidedly a gentlemanly-looking Jew, of some fifty years of age.

On our entrance he snatched up, and put hurriedly on a pair of large green spectacles, as I thought to conceal his general expression of eye, and enable him to reconnoitre us, rather than to aid his vision.

“I believe we have the pleasure of seeing Doctor Adderfang?” said the major, with freezing mock politeness.

“Moses Adderfang, at your service, gentlemen,” replied the Jew, rising, bowing politely, and pointing to three antique chairs.

However, as we manifested no desire to sit in his presence, he was compelled to stand, and eyed us rather curiously and uneasily.

“We have come in search of certain information, herr doctor, which you alone can give us,” said I, in an explanatory tone.

“Oh, oh! I understand,” said he, with an air of relief, while laying his hand on a pack of cards. “I do know something beyond the mere mortal power and science of medicine; though to speak of such knowledge is too often to court the laughter of the scoffer, or the impertinent intervention of the gendarmes, even in this free city of Hamburg.”

“Ah, indeed! And what do you know?” asked Von Gordon, whose scornful bearing was the reverse of polite.

“Know, mein herr! What caused the persecution of Galileo? What brought the gifted Savonarola to the flames, and consigned Doctor Faustus to the infernal fiend?”

"Talking gibberish in lieu of common sense, perhaps," suggested Graves.

"Excuse me, but if you know so much, through the medium of the occult sciences, perhaps you are already aware of the errand on which we are come?"

"Pardon, mein herr, but of that, as yet, I know no more than of what is going on among the men in the moon or the Georgium Sidus, if men there are in either. But, without dabbling in magic or leaguings with Satan, it is possible to foretell the future by cards—yea, even by vulgar playing cards."

"Fortune-telling be hanged, sir," said the major. "My fortune was told long ago. I know that if I live five years longer I shall be a full colonel—ten years longer, a lieutenant-general, and then I shall be content. We have not come to endure the mummery of having our fortunes read."

"You will, perhaps, be good enough to explain on what errand you have come."

"To inquire into the misfortune of another person—a misfortune in which you have had some guilty hand."

"I, mein herr?"

"You, Moses Adderfang, quack and conjuror. Let us fully understand each other," said Von Gordon, casting off his cloak, and showing his uniform, with sword and gorget, as a Prussian field officer. "You furnished a drug or drugs, medicines or specifics of some kind, during the months of April or May, for a lady who resided with Ulrik Rosing, the miller, at Ependorf."

"Perhaps," said the quack doctor, looking pale and rather disturbed. "In my extensive practice, I furnish drugs for so many that I cannot recall this particular case."

"The burgomaster shall find means of refreshing your memory," said I, "so consider well what you are about. We have reason to believe that the lady met with foul play. She died on the twenty-fifth of May, after getting from the hand of her husband, Herr van Neukerque, a drug prescribed and furnished by you."

I made this allegation to bring him to the point at once, and the shot told.

"Dead!" exclaimed Adderfang, with an expression of astonishment and dismay too genuine to be feigned.

"Dead, and now buried in the public cemetery outside the Damm Gate," said I.

"And her husband—"

"Is still in Hamburg, but under an assumed name."

"And the name, itself a falsehood, he has dared to carve upon her tombstone," added the major.

"The drug I prescribed to the herr—her husband—was harmless. It was but a sleeping draught, to give the appearance of death. Aqua tofana was certainly one ingredient, but—Himmel! he cannot have buried her alive!"

This was a new and terrible idea that had not occurred to us. It froze us into silence, and for a full minute we looked blankly into each other's faces. Our dismay was increasing. The quack doctor took a vellum-bound volume from a private drawer, selected a page, and ran his finger and eyes over it. He then spoke.

"On the twenty-second of May—here it is duly entered—I gave a sleeping draught for the wife of Herr van Neukerque, of Ependorf."

"Of what was it composed? Speak, charlatan!" I exclaimed, with irrepressible fury; but he replied—

"If its component parts would defy all the scrutiny and acumen of a college of physicians, what would it avail to attempt enlightening you?"

"What were its properties?"

"To cause a sleep resembling death for at least eighteen hours, and a total disorder of the intellects for some days after, but nothing more, nothing worse, as I shall answer to heaven. Even the worst of men are not bad at all times."

"And you were paid for this villany of course?"

"You give a hard name to the practice of physic," replied the unabashed Jew. "Yes, yes, I was well paid—nobly and royally paid—by two hundred Prussian dollars."



"Der teufel!—the day's pay of a regiment a thousand strong, for twelve hours of such work as we had in Holstein," exclaimed the major.

"But death could not result from the potion, unless her constitution was utterly ruined. If the Herr van Neukerque has played me false—or if, as I fear, he has interred her in her sleep—I shall be ready to come forward with you in the duty of exposing him."

"I fear your appearance in a court of law will not be favourable to yourself," said Von Gordon, wrapping himself once more in his military cloak.

"The slumber was to last eighteen hours, you say?"

"Eighteen, at least."

"And for what purpose was the apparent madness that was to follow?"

"That was the business of her husband, not mine," he replied, looking down.

"And you gave the draught on the twenty-second of May?"

"Yes; my entry is accurate."

"The lady died on the twenty-fifth."

"Three days of difference; but I know not when he may have given it."

"Yours is an honourable art truly," said the major sternly; "but I would advise you to give up pharmacy and stick to conjuring, or you may find that precious neck of yours in a tight noose some day, herr doctor, and what a loss you would be to Hamburg!"

"Every one in this wicked, wicked world is the victim of somebody's envy or malevolence, and find listeners for their evil words, so I cannot be singular."

"We have nothing more to learn here, gentlemen, so we may as well be gone," said the major, turning on his heel. "Get a light, fellow, and conduct us to the door."

"I have learned that to-night which has put a climax to my horror and dismay. Oh, major, we must see this matter to the end, otherwise I shall go mad," said I, as we descended the staircase, and issued from the strange dilapidated old house into the dark *cul-de-sac*.

## CHAPTER LV.

DURING the whole of the following day I saw nothing of Major von Gordon, on whose advice and assistance I now mainly relied, as he was occupied on military duty by the great review and brigade inspection at Altona before the Crown Prince of Prussia, and I saw little of Graves, as he, perhaps finding me but dull society, had gone to see the military show, where, as he informed me on returning in the evening, he had seen Schencke van Neukerque caracoling on a fine horse beside the carriage of the beautiful Kathi, the Countess of Klampenborg, with whose name his was associated in the mouths of all as the Baron Elandberg, and as an affianced pair.

One oppressing thought occupied me during the whole of that long and weary day. Was she buried alive?

Could this dreadful catastrophe have occurred—this inhuman crime been perpetrated—and by that man who was now, as yet, free, happy, and to all appearance enjoying all the pleasures of wealth and the luxuries of life? Oh, to think of this event in all its harrowing details, “in the dead waste and middle of the night!”

I saw it all clearly enough now. He had trapped the soft-hearted and somewhat lonely Clarice into a marriage which had gratitude, not love, for its basis. He had squandered her little fortune and grown weary of her, and was now ready, if rid of her, to repair his shattered finances by another marriage with the wealthy but somewhat loose Countess of Klampenborg—the widow of an old and doting merchant and miser.

Early next morning the major entered my room with his sword and spike helmet on, for the Prussian officers never wear “mufti” like us, and I could see that his grim, bronzed, and soldier-like face was full of eagerness and importance.

“Mein herr,” said he, “no apology will be necessary for my coming upon you at an hour so early when I tell you of

the tidings I have. Last night, after the review at Altona, I was driven into Hamburg in the carriage of the senior burgo-master, who is an old friend of mine. I told him all your story—our story, I may call it now—and he was filled with indignation and astonishment.”

“Well might he be so.”

“So he sent at once for the chief of the police, and two warrants were instantly issued—one to arrest Schencke van Neukerque, *alias* the Baron Elandberg, and the other to exhume the remains of his wife.”

A deep groan escaped me.

“Or the person who is buried under that name. I see how deeply you are moved ; but this last measure is most necessary.”

“For what purpose, herr major ? My whole soul revolts at such a violation.”

“First we must ascertain whether she has been buried alive while under the influence of some powerful narcotic, or whether she was actually poisoned outright, for we cannot altogether accept the assertions of the wretched quack, Moses Adderfang, who is now under the surveillance of the police, lest he should attempt to escape, as we already fear our baron has done, for he is nowhere to be found.”

“Indeed ! so soon ?”

“Yes, he is gone. One account says for Berlin, another for Copenhagen.”

“I shall follow him to the end of the earth ! But, oh, major, how can I repay you for all your kindness ?”

“By taking a little courage.”

“It has not been wanting in me in past times.”

“Of that I am assured. The remains of the dead lady must be by some means identified.”

“Identified ?”

“Yes ; and the task—a terrible one certainly—must devolve on you, the Herr Graves, or my old comrade, Ulrik Rosing and his wife.”

“Oh, any one but me, herr major—oh, any one but me ?”

I exclaimed, in a faint voice. "However, 'if 'twere well done, then 'twere well it were done quickly;' and the sooner this chapter of horrors is over the better."

"I quite agree with you. 'When pain is to be borne, better bear it at once,' as the surgeon said when he cut the Danish bullet out of my leg at Düppel."

The major who looked somewhat gravely himself at the repugnant task before us, handed me a bumper of seltzer water strongly dashed with brandy; put on his black-glazed leather helmet, and looking at his watch, said—

"A guard of gendarmes is to take possession of the cemetery gates at this very moment."

"For what purpose?"

"To keep away a crowd. The vulgar are so morbidly curious, and we must be preserved from unseemly interruption."

"Alas, I comprehend."

\* Come then, my friend, let us go."

And taking his arm, I went forth like one who was walking in his sleep.

Graves soon joined us, and in silence we proceeded along the beautiful green avenue of the Alsterdamm, issued from the city gate, and were admitted into the cemetery by the gendarmes, and there we were met by Moses Adderfang, who looked very ill at ease. His nose seemed to be more hooked than ever, and his quick, beady eyes more restless than when we saw him last. He bowed with abject humility to the major and me, but without receiving the least response from either of us.

There, too, were Ulrik Rosing, the miller of Ependorf, and Gretchen, his buxom wife, from whose cheeks the roses had fled, for she was scared by the sight of the Prussian gendarmes, pale with terror, and in tears at an event and proceedings so unusual.

Already the violation of the tomb had commenced, for there was not a human being present who had any legal right to protest against it. The smooth turf which for four months

had covered it was now removed, and rolled carefully away on one side, two gravediggers were shovelling out the earth calmly and stolidly, and close by were two gentlemen, who I was informed were eminent doctors, and a third, one of the four syndics of Hamburg, stood at the head of the grave. He was clad in his official costume—a black velvet cloak, an Elizabethan ruff, and had a chain round his neck of golden links, a white rod or staff in his right hand, and on his head a high-crowned hat, which he lifted at our approach.

“A painful affair, mein herr,” said he to me.

“Harrowing, indeed.”

“The lady, I believe, was your sister—at least, rumour says so.”

My lips moved, my teeth chattered; but I was incapable of reply, and cared little what rumour said.

Though feeling as one in a terrible dream, all the details of this morning scene were impressed upon me keenly and most vividly. I saw the great red steeple of St. Michael’s towering skyward, and I heard the roar of human life in busy Hamburg like a drowsy hum in my ears.

The scene around me was one “of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower,” though the season was autumn, and though the dead lay thick below that velvet turf, which the hand of affection had in most instances studded with flowering shrubs and little trees, and though crosses, urns, obelisks and sarcophagi, hung with wreaths of *immortelles*, stood thickly there.

Trifles seemed to have a strange interest for me then, and I can remember how my eyes wandered over the inscriptions in this “Field of God,” though most of them contained little more than the names of the deceased, with the simple words *fod* (born) and *dod* (died), with a text or so from scripture; but ever and anon the horrid jarring of the two shovels among the soil and stones recalled me keenly to the dreadful work in hand.

I had once been present at an exhumation of a similar kind, but in which I had, fortunately, no interest. It was when

quartered in an English country town, and I remembered all the details of that affair—the sickening horror when the coffin was brought slowly to the surface and laid upon an adjacent tombstone, and *the thing*, the outline of a wasted form in all its ghastly angularity, that was lifted forth in the glorious sunshine, enveloped in a white sheet that, for sanitary reasons, had been drenched in some disinfecting fluid and chloride of lime. Then followed the rapid work of the doctors, the sharp knives that flashed in the light, and the shrieks of the women who were borne away fainting.

While such thoughts and memories were thronging through my mind, the reader may imagine the emotion with which I heard a new horror suggested as the cause of death by one Hamburg doctor to the other and the syndic.

“When I was at Cagliari, in Sardinia, last year,” said he, “I was professionally, though then a tourist, concerned in a very shocking event. A man named Mathias, a wealthy Swiss, who lodged with me in the hotel of Michael Durandi, opposite the viceregal palace, was found dead in his apartment, without anything having occurred to account for the catastrophe. A surgeon, a native of Pisa, was sent for, and after a brief examination he declared that M. Mathias had died in the night of cerebral congestion, and the authorities ordered Durandi at once to inter the body. As the persons appointed for that purpose were removing the coffin from the hotel, some drops of blood were seen to trickle from it. I was the first to perceive these, and urged Durandi to have it opened.

“He consented with great reluctance, and those who were present insisted that I, as a medical man, should make an examination of the body of Mathias. I did so, and found a wound in the body, made, apparently with a very fine stiletto. It was six inches in depth, and quite penetrated the heart, and the small orifice had been tightly stopped up with lint, wax, and camphor. From this, and some other features in the case, I declared it to be my opinion that Mathias had been assassinated in his sleep. Many persons were arrested,

but the murderer was never discovered, though a stiletto exactly such as I suspected to have been used was found in a dark corridor in the hotel next day. Now if a narcotic was given in the present instance, as the quack, Adderfang, asserts, a similar crime may have taken place here."

"We shall see," replied the syndic.

At last a hollow sound came from the grave beneath the iron spades, and I seemed to feel it in my soul.

I had no portrait or miniature of her. I had only the faded neck ribbon, exchanged at the old ruined tower on Cheviot side for the gold necklet, which the Caffres, or the Cape Rifle deserters, had stolen from her. I had also the letter which she had written in pencil from General Somerset's camp, and these were the only relics I possessed of Clarice Haywood. I had not even a simple carte de visite, though to possess such I would have given my right hand; but now I dared not trust myself to look, lest I might see that which would blast and blight the remainder of my life—a sight such as the eyes of affection should never, and could never, gaze upon.

I shrank back and turned away, though "the horror of the spectacle might, perhaps, have superseded the memory of despair."

"Graves, old fellow, or you, herr major, tell me what they find. Gretchen Rosing may yet recognize—She was brown-haired, with minute features, and—and—and——"

Tears choked my utterance.

"The hair will be here, no doubt, mein herr," said one of the Hamburg doctors—he of the Cagliari reminiscence; "but by this time—nearly four months," he added, with professional coolness, while glancing at the date on the tombstone, "I greatly fear that the features of the corpse will scarcely be——"

"Hush, herr doctor," said Major Gordon. "Come a little this way aside, Captain Haddon. I do feel for you—on my soul I do!"

"Herr major, I thank you, and pray excuse my emotion."

"No excuse is necessary. You have your own secrets of

the heart, and on these I have no wish to intrude. I had such thoughts once myself ; but they are passed now—gone like the flowers of summer, but not, like them, to bloom again. Alas for the poor human heart when its blossoms die !”

“We were betrothed, this dead lady and I—betrothed for—But the time matters nothing now.”

“No ; little indeed, save a memory to treasure and to dream over.”

The coffin was now brought to the surface. I gave it one steady, piercing glance—its cloth was mouldy and damp, its grim ornaments were already rusty—and then I turned away.

“There is a strange, hard look about you, Dick Haddon,” said Graves kindly, taking my hands in his.

He had never ventured to call me Dick before ; but he was considerably moved himself now, and his face was white as a sheet. He had undoubtedly admired Clarice, and the memory of a pleasant past was coming back vividly now.

“A hard look, say you. Perhaps so,” said I ; “for now I am a man with a settled purpose—a stern end in view—for there is on my brow and in my heart a shadow that will never pass away.”

“Open it !” we heard the voice of the syndic say.

“They are opening the coffin,” whispered Graves.

“O, heaven !”

We turned away.

No exclamation of pity, commiseration, of awe or repugnance, followed the unclosing of the lid from the group who drew near, but a clamorous shout of astonishment.

What did it mean ?

“There is no body here,” exclaimed the syndic.

The coffin was filled with stones and sawdust.

So thoroughly had my senses been wrapped up in the conviction that I was close to the awful remains of her I loved, that some minutes elapsed before I became certain of what was really in the coffin, and that the funeral, the grave with



its turf, the tomb with its inscription, each and all were but parts of some deeper dream, and of a dreadful and sacrilegious mockery.

But where, then, was the body?

Ulrik Rosing and his wife both swore positively to having seen and touched her corpse; but the task of placing her in the coffin had been performed by the Herr van Neukerque alone and unseen, while locked in the chamber with the dead, whose loss he affected to deplore with loud lamentations.

"You remember, herr syndic, that the Alster washes the wall below the window of the room in which the body lay?" I heard Ulrik Rosing say.

"Perfectly," replied the magistrate.

"Then what so easy as to throw her into the river——"

"In her sleep, and while the narcotic had its power—the narcotic, herr syndic; for remember that my potion was simply a narcotic, as my book will testify," urged Adderfang, with growing anxiety.

"But why do so, when all the necessary arrangements had been made for a solemn funeral in the usual manner? To the chief of the police we must leave the unravelling of this new mystery. Meanwhile, Moses Adderfang, you must find security for your appearance when wanted in the sum of five hundred Prussian dollars, or go to prison."

"Oh, where am I to find so much money?"

"That is your affair, Jew, not mine."

And here, as far as the cemetery was concerned, the matter ended.

I remembered how his brother Schalk had stolen in the night and concealed the body of Gertrude van Bommel for a purpose which we could not divine; and I felt now as if my brain would turn in earnest, while the major and Graves almost pushed me into a droschki, and we drove back at a furious pace to the Hôtel de l'Europe.

## CHAPTER LVI.

THOSE who have travelled by railway from Hamburg to Kiel—one of those flat and monotonous lines of rail, without either cutting, banking, or tunnelling—may have observed, in the dreary level but occasionally fertile district which extends north of Altona through all Holstein, a quaint old mansion of a square form, and having at three of its corners a dilapidated turret; at the fourth angle a round tower somewhat shorn of its fair proportions.

In early ages this mansion had been the residence of a man of rank, from whom it is still named Rolandsburg, and in the famous war of 1500, when the Holsteiners, or people of Ditmarsh, defeated a Danish army of thirty thousand men, and slew more than a third of them, Rolandsburg was twice taken and retaken, battered, blown up, and burnt down.

It is situated in a district that has not yet been all reclaimed, about five miles from Altona, which is only separated from Hamburg by a piece of open and neutral ground—the “Field of the Holy Ghost”—and is surrounded by bogs, small lakes, and heaths, like the poorest part of Hanover.

Hence Rolandsburg was valueless as a modern residence, and after figuring for some time as a granary, with a windmill whitening its brown sails on the round tower at its angle, it was plundered and partly destroyed by the French foragers during the siege of Hamburg, and it remained a ruin until Doctor Moses Adderfang conceived the idea of converting it into a species of private lunatic asylum, and as such he had rented it for a trifle yearly from the magistrates of Altona before the Danish war, and since the city changed its masters he had been in some measure left in undisturbed possession of the desolate old place.

Surviving war and fire, the strong iron gratings of the days when it figured in history as a fortified dwelling still remained in all its windows, defying ingress and egress, and the remains of a rushy and reedy moat were traceable around it, where, when the season was wet, the oozy and stagnant water

gathered as of old, and there large water-docks and lilies floated, and the snipe and woodcock built their nests.

Here Moses Adderfang kept four or five lunatics, whose friends—obscure dwellers in the vicinity of the Stubbeneuk—wished to hear no more of them, and were content to pay a sum yearly for their maintenance and seclusion until such time as he announced that the patient was dead, though some there were who shrewdly surmised that he was in no hurry to bring them such information.

None that he had secluded here were outrageous, but simply imbecile, or labouring under mental delusions: One old man imagined himself to be Peter the Great of Russia, and another, who had gone mad in consequence of his losses in the late war, imagined himself Count of Holstein and leader of the Schleswig cavalry, in which capacity he was wont to gallop round his chamber daily astride on an old broom.

The mother of the Jew, Rachel Adderfang, was the veritable ideal of a thorough Jewish hag—a large, bloated, and corpulent woman, with fierce, glittering, and dishonest black eyes, enormous yellow teeth, and flabby, white, pendulous cheeks—a woman whose whole air and aspect told of a life of iniquity, spent within the condemned limits of the Schweizerstrasse and lowest purlieu of Hamburg.

This personage, with two other women of pretty similar character and one man, had charge of this unwholesome dwelling, secluded among the fens of Holstein, about three miles from the Kiel line of railway, and, as I have said, five miles from Hamburg.

In this place did Clarice Haywood find herself on recovering from the powerful narcotic which Van Neukerque administered to her.

She found herself undressed, in a strange bed in a strange room, having its walls white-washed, its floor destitute of carpet, a window twice the size of those in Ulrik's cottage, but thickly grated with iron.

She imagined herself to be dreaming; her head swam, her senses reeled. She closed her aching eyes. There was a

burning pain in her throat, with an intense thirst, which she had no means of alleviating, a palpitation about her heart, a numbness in her limbs, and she hoped that she was now about to die.

Alas! she had no desire to live.

Van Neukerque—who had led the Countess of Klampenborg to believe him a man of rank—had actually conceived, but shrunk from the peril, of poisoning Clarice to remove her from his path and his other matrimonial prospects.

To the countess, who knew that Clarice was in bad health, he had announced her death, and inserted it among the obituaries in the Hamburg papers; and to carry out yet more completely the game in view, had the further but necessary mockery of a funeral, and a tomb erected inscribed with the new name which he had adopted. But, by a previous arrangement with the wily Adderfang, in the same boat which brought the coffin up the Alster to Ependorf he had her conveyed away.

She was lifted in her unnatural sleep from the bed; taken through the back window of Rosing's cottage, and conveyed across the river to where Adderfang, with a droschki, awaited her on the opposite side of the Alster, and he drove off with her to Rolandsburg, while Van Neukerque acted the despairing widower before the simple-hearted miller and his wife, and frequently, in the ardour of his grief, embraced the box of stones and rubbish, which he apostrophized as the coffin of his lost Clarice.

The latter was to be treated to all intents and purposes as a mad-woman, and to be kept secluded in Rolandsburg so long as his excellency the Baron Elandberg paid for her maintenance, or till she was otherwise disposed of; but the worthy son of Israel, on whose tender mercies she was cast, resolved to treat her better than his other patients, for now that he had secure possession of her he meant to make the fact of her existence a kind of patent screw wherewith to extract unlimited gold from the "baron" if he became the husband of the countess, whose property, fortunately for the schemes of Adderfang, lay in the immediate vicinity of Hamburg.

More than this, the villanous Jew saw that their common victim was delicate and beautiful, and he was not without other views for himself respecting her—views which were fully developed ere long.

The treatment she had undergone at the hands of Van Neukerque—her exposure scarcely clad by night in a boat on a cold river—her drive through the marshy district to Rolandsburg—the effects of the narcotic which had been given her when she was really ill and oppressed by a long term of mental distress and repentance of her marriage—had all conduced to bring on a kind of low fever, and by the circumstances of the illegal place in which she was secluded she was deprived of proper medical aid.

Thus, after her removal there, many weeks went by, during which she passed through all the phases of a protracted intermittent fever, sometimes shivering as if amid ice, sometimes burning hot as if near a furnace—at one time sleeping as if in a state of utter torpor for hours—at another, unnaturally wakeful, and filled with wild and wandering fancies, when she would think herself dreaming, as amid them the scenes of her past life, all mingled in utter incongruity, floated before her : Walcot Tower, her early home among the Northumbrian fells, her father's kind old face and glistening white hair, her sister a playful romp, her own first love—the separation and re-union, the terrors of the Caffre war and long wanderings since by land and sea—all these came by fits and starts in gleams of memory that made her weep till the sleepy torpor would steal over her again.

At one time she was nearly dead, and the chance of this catastrophe filled Moses Adderfang with wrath, and dread lest he should thereby lose his power over Van Neukerque and the countess, for whose marriage he longed hourly ; but the rules even of Hamburg society required a certain time of mourning to elapse, and so now the summer had stolen into brown autumn. But Rachel Adderfang, though a very incarnation of the spirit of avarice, would rather have hailed her demise as a relief, for she was heartily sick of attending a patient who neither got better nor worse, who was so sad and

weariful—exceedingly weariful—whose illness was so protracted, and whose wants were so many, as she was not permitted by Moses to follow the dictates of her own spirit by limiting the comforts of Clarice to a bundle of straw, a German roll, and a pitcher of water daily, with now and then a few blows from a whip, as in the instance of the Count of Holstein and Peter the Great, whose cells adjoined each other.

The room of Clarice was plainly furnished ; yet the grated window, with undisturbed cobwebs, the whitewashed walls, and the bare floor, gave it, to an English eye especially, an aspect of squalor.

Her door was well secured on the outside, where it opened on a stone, arched corridor, closed by a gate of massive strength, old, perhaps, as the days when Ditmarsh was subdued, in 1559.

The fever left her so weak that she could scarcely speak, and so listless that fully two or three days elapsed before she cared to inquire where she was.

Her first painful idea, from the aspect of her strange apartment, was that, as a *finale* to his long course of cruelty and misconduct, Van Neukerque had absconded—left her—and that she was now in some public hospital, and in a foreign land.

## CHAPTER LVII.

THE remarkable figures and faces of Moses Adderfang and his mother were familiar to her eye, and their voices to her ear, for she had seen one and heard the other during her long delirium.

On the second morning after the crisis was past, a desire to know where she was came upon her, and struggling from her bed with slow and feeble steps, and with a shawl thrown over her, she peeped through the well-barred window.

On one hand, some miles away, a mass of smoke or haze, or both, curled in the morning sun, and amid this several spires stood red and glowing in his early rays. She thought she could recognize the aspect of Hamburg and Altona, for was there not that particularly lofty tower, the great steeple of St. Michael, where the fire watch sat night and day.

Over the level land on the other side, where the white sails of ships and the red funnels of steamers could be seen gliding, she recognized the broad Elbe, rolling on its way to Cuxhaven and the sea, and yonder blue hills, more distant still, she knew must be those of Hanover.

She had no doubt of all this.

"But where am I, in whose care, and where are Ulrik the miller and his kind wife, Gretchen?" she murmured, as she crept, shuddering, back to bed, rested her head on the pillow, and closed her eyes, as if she cared not to open them again.

Of the woman who brought her the slight meal with which she broke her fast she made some inquiries, to which she received only a sneering smile in reply, and after a time the advice not to trouble herself, as she might know in good time, if, indeed, she ever knew it at all.

Although the district in which his obscure establishment at Rolandsburg is situated was beyond the jurisdiction of the Hamburg police, Moses Adderfang, fearful of something transpiring by which he might lose the five hundred dollars he had given as security for his good conduct and appearance when wanted, chose for the present to visit the half-ruined place only by night.

In his first alarm after the discovery by the authorities of the mock interment, he would not have been sorry had Clarice actually died, for the discovery of her alive in his hands would have ensured him a few years' very unprofitable employment in a Prussian fortress, with a twelve-pound shot chained to his legs. Thus, as he came to Rolandsburg under cloud of night alone, Clarice was spared that which she very soon found to be his very odious presence by day.

On the second night she was aroused by the unbarring of her door, a light flashed redly into her bare, dark room—for the miserly mother of Adderfang, true to the saving instincts of her race, denied her the use of candles as an unnecessary luxury—and Adderfang entered.

He wore a dark green surtout, heavily trimmed with dark brown fur, his thick crimped hair was well oiled and brushed,

and he had made, so far as mosaic studs, rings, and gloves went, rather a more careful toilet than usual. He knew perfectly well that the Frau van Neukerque was in full possession of all her senses, and he wished to make a good impression, although her hollow cheeks and haggard eyes failed to inspire him with pity.

He bowed, smiled, and taking her right hand between his own, affected to feel her pulse, while gazing into her eyes with a look which he meant to be one of tenderness, and poor Clarice, in her simplicity, supposed to be mere commiseration.

How loosely hung that mockery, the wedding hoop, upon her now wasted finger—ay, loosely as the opal ring that guarded it had done until abstracted by Rachel Adderfang, and as yet, in sooth, Clarice had never missed it.

"You are better to-night—much better," said Adderfang approvingly, and retaining her tremulous hand in his until she felt herself compelled to withdraw it.

"You think so, sir?"

"Decidedly; my mode of treatment has been most signally successful."

His "mode of treatment" had consisted of simply leaving Nature to effect her own cure, and perhaps it was fortunate for Clarice that he did so.

"All your wants are attended to, I hope?"

"All."

"And you have no wish?"

"Save one—to know where I am, and with whom."

"You express two wishes in this. Well, they shall be gratified in good time. Your strength must be restored, and wine given you. See, I have brought some with me," he added, taking a crystal flask of port from his pocket, for he knew well that if he intrusted wine to his worthy maternal parent, their patient would see little of it.

He poured some into a glass, and Clarice took it, without suspicion that she was receiving it from the very hand which had prepared that fatal drug, the narcotic, under the influence of which she had been spirited away.



The wine was good, though obtained only at the Altona railway station, and it tended to restore her. Then again she implored him to tell her where she was, and when she might be permitted to write to her sister, but met with the same reply.

"All in good time. You must take more of this wine to-morrow, and at night I shall see you again."

Then, with a leer which he intended should be a very loving one, Adderfang withdrew, and secured the door on the outside, a precaution which now, for the first time, struck Clarice as being a somewhat unusual and alarming mode of doing so.

The wine he had given her did restore some strength and animation to Clarice; and next night when, just as before, Adderfang presented himself at her bedside, and went through the farce of feeling her pulse, she again said:

"Kind herr doctor, will you please to tell me the name of this place, and of the people with whom I am?"

"You are with me," he replied with a leering smile, and still retaining her hand.

She withdrew it beneath her bedclothes abruptly, for there was no mistaking his manner now.

"But where, mein herr, where?" she asked firmly.

"In my house."

"Near Hamburg, or at Ependorf?"

"Neither madam; but at Rolandsburg, in Holstein," he replied bluntly; for the sharp withdrawal of the small hand, and something in the expression of her face, made the brutal Jew, who felt how completely he had her in his power and at his mercy, glow with anger.

"In Holstein?" repeated Clarice.

"Ay, Holstein. What so wonderful in that?"

"Heavens! Have my senses been wandering?" she exclaimed, pressing her thin, wan hands upon her throbbing temples.

"Of course, your senses have been wandering, otherwise you would not have been here."

Clarice did not take in his meaning.

"Where is my—my—husband?"

"Do you mean the Baron Elandberg?" sneered the Jew, "on the Herr van Neukerque?"

"I mean the Herr van Neukerque," replied Clarice, with the faintest approach to *hauteur*. "Where is he?"

"Where he usually is, and has been, since your death—by the side of the Countess of Klampenborg."

The Jew thought to excite a little jealousy might be in his favour; but weak though she was, she disdained to resent the latter part of his speech.

"Herr doctor," said she, "what do you mean by *death*? Are you raving?"

"I have been prepared for all these questions, and yet am not taking, I fear, the right or safest mode of enlightening you."

"My husband—for though cruel and heartless he is my husband still——"

"He has abandoned you to me—my care, I mean—for ever. You are entered and recorded here at my asylum of Rolandsburg as a lunatic under your own name of Van Neukerque, and as a dead woman under another name elsewhere. Thus, being doubly dead to the world, you have nothing to hope for but through my clemency."

Though she failed in a great extent to understand all this mysterious speech, she knew the atrocities of which her husband was capable; and like a person stunned by a thunder-clap as one in a dream, who seemed in terror of awakening to life and its realities.

"Do you remember the sleeping draught which Van Neukerque gave you in a crystal cup at the house of Ulrik Rosing, after his return one night from Hamburg?"

"Perfectly."

"It was a powerful narcotic, under which you slept for fully four-and-twenty hours, though we calculated on only eighteen. In that sleep you were seen by the Rosings, and supposed to be dead, but were borne here and sold to me for a good sum in rix-dollars to cover all responsibility, while a box of bricks was buried in your name in the public cemetery, and now the grass of fully three months has grown over it."

"And was this cruel, this daring scheme my husband's—oh, that I should live to call him so—or yours?"

"His, and his only. He paid me well, and I must make an honest living."

"Separation from the man I am tied to is a boon ; but to be supposed to be dead——"

"Yes ; and buried too. See, look you here," added the Jew, in his thick, husky voice, while drawing from his pocket and unfolding an old, tattered, and dirty number of the *Hamburger Correspondente*, and he placed before her the obituaries, among which she read——

"*25th of May, died, at Ependorf, Clarice Haywood, wife of Schenke, Baron Elandberg.*"

"The twenty-fifth of May !" said she.

"And this is now September."

"This is certainly my name, herr doctor ; but whence this title of Baron Elandberg ?" she asked, with surprise.

"Your husband adopted it after your supposed demise."

"Adopted !"

"Yes, asserting to the countess, whom he is about to marry, and to others in Hamburg, that it had been bestowed upon him by the British Government, for his eminent services in a late colonial war."

"Then the man has become an impostor ?"

The Jew shrugged his shoulders and smiled significantly.

"You know, herr doctor, that I am not insane ?" said Clarice, after another pause.

"I know that, of course," said he insinuatingly.

"Then, surely you will not be so barbarous, so very cruel——"

"As to keep you here, you would say ?"

"Yes."

"Here you are now, and here you must stay."

"I shall appeal——"

"To whom ? Who knows of you in Hamburg, save one, and his life, liberty, and future fortune all depend upon his secluding you here, or, it may be, killing you. You will appeal——ha ! ha !"

"Yes ; to the authorities."

"Bah ! Our doors are strong, our gratings are thick, and

we have harness and chains for the refractory. The authorities indeed ! How will your prayers ever reach them ? I laugh at your threats ; but my mother may not, for she has an ugly whip, which she uses at times. Ah, you should see how she makes Peter the Great and the Count of Holstein skip with it."

"Great heaven ! is it even thus with me ?" exclaimed Clarice, in uncontrollable anguish.

"Precisely so, and what more would you have ? Are you not comfortable enough, and when once you get well and strong, and are able to get out as far as the corridor or court-yard, you will see how kind and loving I shall be to you."

He attempted to kiss her hand ; but she gave him a glance in which utter loathing was so painfully blended with imploring that it filled the Jew with anger and mockery.

"Oh, Van Neukerque, would to heaven you had let me drown ! To what a pass have you reduced me !"

"Ah, a nice husband, was he not ? But I may make amends to you, my dearie."

"I am, and have been, the wife of a wretch," she said to herself, with her eyes fixed on the ceiling ; "yet I loved another well, and might still live on the memory of that love."

"Folly all ! This is the raving of a true lunatic," said Adderfang ; "but if you must love some one, why not love me ?—that is, when you get well and strong—oh yes, well and strong."

"Silence, and begone !" she exclaimed, covering her face with her hands.

"You are in my power—ha ! ha !"

"And you in mine—if I escape."

"You are wise to say 'if.' None ever went from here except in a coffin—and some," he added, with a dark and terrible expression of face, "have not had even that."

For a moment he lingered, lamp in hand, regarding her with a strangely malevolent smile ; then he retired, leaving her in total darkness, and to her own terrible thoughts.

"Oh," she moaned, "for one whisper of the voice, one touch of the hand of him I once loved so well! Once! Can it indeed be once! Do I not love him still—more than ever? And now I know that he lives—that 'twas himself I saw at Puerto Rico, and no illusion—following me always, as Fanny told me—ever one thought—the thought of me. Oh, what a heart I lost when I lost his!"

Her mourning for my supposed death had long been past.

She knew now that I lived, and had a horror of what I might think of her. Oh, how she longed to die! Why, when rendered independent and free beyond all chance of a precarious life, had she cast herself away upon Van Neukerque?—why uttered the cold vow which bound her to him irrevocably.

#### CHAPTER LVIII.

"Is escape not possible?" she began to think. "We read of prisoners escaping every day; but there, they are strong, resolute, and desperate men—not poor and weak creatures such as I am. Was not our release from Sandilli more miraculous than any escape could be in this, a civilized land?"

Once out of this place, she thought, the first man she appealed to might be able to protect her, and willing to do so, for the Holsteiners were worthy and honest people; but now the discovery of an importunate love in the person of her so-called medical attendant proved a new and afflicting source of fear to her.

Could she but stoop to dissemble, she might gain from his flattered hope, his confidence, or his lulled suspicions, what she could never win from his justice or clemency; but she shrank with loathing from a task so odious. The more she reviewed her situation now, the more helpless did she feel—the more completely in his power. To the few friends who knew and cared for her all traces of her would be obliterated.

In the buried wife of the so-called Baron Elandberg, who could suspect the wife of Van Neukerque? If she was alleged, or supposed to be mad, who would believe her assertions of what she was, or who she was? More than all this,

the cruel and subtle trickster, who had now changed his name by the adoption of a spurious or imaginary title to gratify the pride of a beautiful woman of vast wealth and doubtful character, would find it his interest, most vital interest—as it was that of Adderfang too—to keep her existence sedulously a secret—in short, to destroy her, perhaps, rather than set her free.

And how easily might the destruction of a being so friendless be achieved in that solitary abode among the fens of Holstein!

At times the chance of such a catastrophe she viewed with indifference, and she almost longed for it as a consummation to be wished—an end to all her misery. At other periods, especially as she grew stronger, it inspired a deadly fear, and made her pant to be far beyond the hated walls and bondage of Rolandsburg.

Then, with the poor little delicate hands, that trembled while in the act, she would examine the massive framework of the window, and the iron bars that were outside it, firmly secured by lead into the solid stone; then her eyes would wander despairingly over the strong door that closed her apartment; but the fastenings of that barrier to the outer world being external, were beyond the reach of her investigation. She only found that to her feeble strength they were immovable as a rock.

On the planks of the uncarpeted floor she gazed with a species of despair, and as the room was furnished with one of those tall iron stoves peculiar to Hamburg, Denmark, and Norway, there was not even a chimney or fireplace, and the circumstance of her once being caught in the act of examining her window by old Rachel Adderfang, who had entered unperceived, so absorbed was the hapless captive in the hope of escape, rendered any offer on her part of assisting in the household duties of the place perfectly useless, for she had contemplated doing so with ulterior views.

The fierce old beldame—the grey-haired Jewess was verging on her seventieth year—sprang upon her like a hyena, shook

her by the shoulders, and dashed her cowering on the floor, using the while the most frightful epithets on discovering her desire to escape, and when Clarice pitifully urged that she was weary of being confined thus, and would gladly make herself of use, work was tossed in to her, hideous rags and sordid vestments to patch and darn ; but she never got beyond the gloomy stone corridor.

She had not been without hope that, could she but gain the confidence of Rachel Adderfang, gain it so far as to be permitted to reach the kitchen of the place occasionally, she might escape, for the dress with which they had provided her would be favourable to her purpose—the picturesque costume of a peasant girl of the country.

“Let me but get strength—strength,” she would mutter from time to time ; “and with heaven’s help I may yet escape.”

A fortnight had now elapsed since Moses Adderfang had shown himself in his true colours, and his almost nightly arrival was a source of infinite dread to Clarice, who twice appealed to his mother for protection from his insolence, but only to be repelled by mockery and laughter.

“He drugged me fatally once,” she thought and from thenceforward she declined everything from his hand. “Oh, what is to prevent him from doing it again, when I am so completely in his power ?”

This terror loomed for ever like a shadow over her.

“Have pity on me,” she once said imploringly, when, holding her fast by the hands, he poured some of his odious love speeches into her ears.

“If you were out of this place, my dear, what pity would you have on me ?” he demanded, through his clenched teeth.

“I should strive to forget that I had ever seen it or you—I would, indeed, as heaven hears me.”

“Heaven hears, but won’t be in a hurry to help you.

“You will be punished terribly for all this.”

“Who would believe the assertions of a madwoman ?” he replied, mistaking her meaning, as he thought only of temporal punishment, and the loss of his five hundred dollars.

"A madwoman?"

"Yes, whose husband, by a written document, committed her to my care."

"Alas, poor me!"

"Friendless and alone, abandoned by the only man who had the right or power to protect you, you are here, penniless and a foreigner. No money comes for your maintenance now, and if you continue to be cruel to me, I may be as cruel as my mother wishes."

"In what way?"

"By putting you in a cell beside a raving madman. Ha, what would you think of that?"

"Oh, Herr Adderfang, listen to me," implored Clarice, while she trembled and panted in his strong and tightening grasp.

"Have you a sister?"

"I had two; but what of that?"

"For their sakes pity me."

"Bah! One died in the gutter, and the other in the krankenhaus."

"In the name of your mother, then."

"She threw me when an infant into one of the canals of Hamburg, where I stuck in the mud till the police found me, sooner than the tide luckily, so I don't owe her much. But I am getting tired of this profitless lovemaking. I shall leave you to darn and patch your rags till to-morrow."

"And then?"

"Hah," said he, grinding his teeth, "if you do not then—"

A knocking on the room door, and the announcement in his mother's voice that a person wished to speak with him, drew away Adderfang, who left her with a threatening gesture of his hand, and an expression of eye that appalled her.

He left her in total darkness, and secured the door behind him. Clarice now sank on her knees to pray; but thoughts and words failed her, for now she started as a hated but familiar voice fell on her ear.

Adderfang and some one were talking in loud and angry tones in the corridor without. She placed her ear to the key-



hole to listen, and heard the voice of one on whom she dared not call for help—her husband—Schencke van Neukerque !

He was speaking loudly and excitedly.

“Lower your voice, mein herr,” said Adderfang, “or she may overhear us.”

“Is she in that room,” asked Neukerque, “that large room still ?”

“You think it too airy and healthy, I presume ?” chuckled the Jew. “Yes, she is there, and temper seems to come with renewed strength.”

“Temper ?”

“Spirit, then.”

“Of what have you to complain so far as I am concerned ?”

“Lack of the necessary remittances from you, Herr van Neukerque.”

“I am known, herr doctor, as the Baron Elandberg.”

“Well, herr baron,” continued Adderfang, with a sneering chuckle in his tone, “your monthly remittances have totally ceased, and in a little time I may be compelled to send her to the asylum for the poor, where the doctors will soon hear her story, and then—”

“Don’t attempt to trifle with me, friend Adderfang. Your five hundred Prussian dollars lie in the bureau of the chief of the police, and you know but too well that the discovery of her existence here would cost you dear.”

“Hah, the discovery of the stones in yonder coffin.”

“I would they had found her bones,” said Neukerque, grinding his teeth, while a little wail escaped Clarice, as she thought of the church in Jamaica, where this man had sworn to love and cherish her until death should part them.

“Why ?”

“Can you ask me why, when now the countess, after all her promises, refuses to marry me ?”

“Wherefore ?” asked the Jew, with alarm.

“On the pretty just plea that my wife must be living ; for, if dead, she would have been found when the syndic dug for her.”

"Whew!" whistled Adderfang. "Here is a precious mess."

"Perdition! Fool that I was to tamper with my fate, and to have so many qualms and scruples about taking whole instead of half measures, when I had her so completely in my power at Ependorf!"

"Suppose I sell her to the man who has done us so much mischief by his impertinent interference?"

"Suppose I blow your brains out?" exclaimed the other furiously.

"Hush—I did but jest."

"I am in no humour for jesting. I cannot remain much longer where you have concealed me. Everywhere the telegraphs have been at work, and the police are on my track. I dare not venture to present myself at any railway station or river steamer, however petty or obscure, and I am in an awkward dilemma."

"Exceedingly, my dear herr baron," said Moses, chuckling, and rubbing his dirty hands together.

"I begin to fear that I must produce this woman alive."

"Why?"

"Lest the authorities arrest me on suspicion of a murder which has not yet taken place, and which they cannot prove."

"But for which they may, until it is proved or disproved, detain you to pick oakum in some prison or fortress. Unpleasant work, herr baron, for so I suppose I must call you, though the English consul refuses to acknowledge your title."

"Hah! you have heard that?"

"I read it in the *Correspondent*."

"The consul is an insolent fool."

"But by producing her, you would reveal our plot and lose all chance of the countess."

"If, indeed, my chances are not already gone."

Then the Jew ground his teeth as he thought of the certain loss of his five hundred dollars, of the failure of his designs, for the present, on Clarice, and for the future on the exchequer of the ci-divant baron and wealthy countess.

There was a pause, after which the Jew said :

"So the fair Kathi has scruples, eh?"

"So have I, and for the safety of us both—that is, you and I, friend Adderfang."

"Well, of us both—say on."

"This woman must die!" Van Neukerque said, lowering his voice to a hiss, yet it reached the strained ear of the listener. "Once put thus to rest, she can ruin us in no way. We can let her body be found somewhere, and I shall account for the empty coffin by persuading the fair Kathi that my wife committed suicide, and so, for my own honour as Baron Elandberg, a funeral was necessary."

"She disappeared in May, and only to be found in September may set the police to think over the subject. It is not a bad idea, however; but how if I won't give her up, dead or alive?"

Van Neukerque responded to this only by a hoarse Dutch oath, and then the clash of the corridor gate as it closed showed that they had passed out, and Clarice, who, pale breathless, and on her knees, had listened to this terrible conversation, heard no more; but every word that had reached her ears sunk like molten lead into her heart.

"Oh," she moaned, as she crept in a fainting condition towards her bed, "what have I done—how, or in what way offended heaven, that I should be left to a fate like this?"

## CHAPTER LIX.

FOR three whole nights and days after this terrible conversation Moses Adderfang did not come to that hated place Rorlandsborg. However, as the chief of the police afterwards discovered, he had been busy—too busy, perhaps—among his drugs, and deep in the study of potions and philtres at his obscure old house in the Stubbeneuk.

Though she knew not what his absence portended, or whence it resulted, it was a source of temporary satisfaction and relief to poor Clarice, but she would fain have dispensed with the attendance of the male factotum employed on the premises by Rachel Adderfang, a foreigner, a native of what

country she knew not, and cared less to inquire, for he was a fierce-looking, dark man, with beetling brows, a black beard, and wore silver rings in his ears ; and though he was taciturn and silent, she began to perceive with fear that he in turn was likely to prove an admirer, for her situation in this horrible place set her so low in the scale of society as to render her open to the insolence of all.

She was helpless—oh, so helpless !

Save for the annoyance given to her by Adderfang how monotonously during the past weeks since her recovery had her existence glided away in that gloomy chamber or cell ! Each hour and each day were like the other, without change. The shadows rose or fell on the whitewashed walls, and by those shadows she had learned to know the hours, as she had long since been deprived of her watch—like her earrings, one of her wedding gifts—by the old Jewess Adderfang, or some of her people.

Day by day the same kind of food was brought her without variety, but not always at the same hour, as the shadows sometimes informed her ; but she was so oblivious of all external objects that she never missed a meal, or seemed to feel that the three women of the place had for a time forgotten her, too probably over a bottle of schiedam or corn brandy.

The Count of Holstein and his czarish majesty Peter the Great were apparently happy enough in their respective dens, for she occasionally heard the former singing merrily, and the latter haranguing his armies on the march to Poland or at the siege of Narva.

On the evening of the fourth day Moses Adderfang arrived unexpectedly at Rolandsburg, having come from Altona in a hackney droschki, and he entered the corridor just as his underkeeper—he of the repulsive aspect, and who seemed to have been a seaman—was taking to Clarice her evening meal—a simple cup of coffee and a hard German roll on a tray.

“ I will give it myself,” said he. “ You may go now.”

“ To the city ?”

“ Yes.”

Then, as the man turned reluctantly away, for he had rather begun to like this new duty of waiting on the pretty captive, Adderfang quick as thought poured into the coffee the contents of a small phial which he held concealed in the hollow of his hand.

This expertly achieved, he suddenly, as if he had changed his mind, recalled his underling, and told him to "take in the patient's food," as he must see his mother directly.

Taciturn, and without a word, the man took the tray from his master's hand, entered the chamber, and shut the door, to a hole in which—an orifice made for the purpose of over-seeing those within—Moses at once applied his cunning and crafty eye.

Clarice was seated on the edge of her humble bed, meekly occupied on some needlework—the sordid rags given to her by Rachel Adderfang—and which she was hastening to finish by the fading light of the evening.

Pale and almost ghastly were the small, minute, but still lovely features of her interesting face. Her soft, dark eyes bore traces of recent and long-continued weeping; the long black eyelashes were melted with tears, and the usually white and delicate lids were red and swollen; but she was past weeping now.

She paused in a listless manner, and dropped her work as the dark-faced keeper entered. The sound had roused her, and she looked up; but her eyes seemed fixed on vacancy—sightless almost, as those of one in a deep reverie.

The fellow went close up to her, and Adderfang, inspired by jealousy, muttered an oath under his breath when he saw him hold the tray before her with one hand, while he stretched the other towards her as if to caress her.

She shrank back, and now her eyes flashed far through the film of her tears

Clarice was never an angel, or faultless as the heroine of a romance. She was gentle and mild, a warm, impulsive, and energetic creature, as ready to make a friend as repulse an enemy; a nervous creature, too, who lived, if one may say

so, seven hundred and thirty days in every year, instead of the usual number. The advance of Adderfang inspired her with fear and utter loathing; but now the sudden insult on the part of his underling filled her with rage.

She drew haughtily back, and pointing to the door she said but one word—

“Begone!”

And then with a glance of spite and hate the fellow put down the tray, and withdrew like a cowed dog. As he passed out into the corridor, Adderfang, who had seen his repulse with grim satisfaction, said—

“You can have the night’s liberty in the city you have so often asked, Balarino. Till morning I shall not require you.”

The man muttered his thanks and disappeared.

Little did Adderfang know what that night’s liberty was to cost him; but with the end he had in view—this learned doctor, the disciple of Galileo, of Savonarola, of Dr. Faustus, and so forth, as he was wont to boast himself in the classic neighbourhood of the Stubbeneuk—thought the absence of his subaltern from Rolandsburg would be advantageous, and once more he applied his keen, beady eye to the hole in the door.

The tears were falling slowly over the cheeks of Clarice, and even into her coffee, as she drank it. Her little hands shook, and the cup rattled against her teeth.

Adderfang almost held his breath as he watched her drink it to the last drop, when suddenly she seemed to become aware of some peculiarity in its flavour, and her eyes dilated as she looked inquiringly and suspiciously among the grounds at the bottom of the cup, and a cruel, derisive smile spread over the tallowy visage of Adderfang, for well he knew that she could detect nothing there.

She set down the cup, and seating herself on the edge of the bed, attempted to resume work, for she dreaded the vituperations of the old Jewish visage; but her fingers failed to guide the needle now, and the garment fell from her hands.

She sighed wearily, and after a time, exclaimed:

"What is this that is coming upon me? Another illness perhaps;" and she placed a hand upon her heart as if to stay its wild fluttering.

The room was beginning to swim round her; each corner seemed to be in pursuit of the other, and many doors and windows appeared in place of two.

She felt certain that she had been drugged once more.

Terrified by the suspicion, she started from the bedside, but had to lean upon the table, as half blind, and heavy sobs rose in her throat.

Drugged! and even while consciousness was passing out of her, she recalled the terrible conversation she had overheard between Neukerque and Adderfang. The torpor was creeping over her—the torpor that was to place her silently and completely at the mercy of one or both of the men, for what black purpose she knew not.

"Oh, good heavens!" she exclaimed, in a strange delirium of mingled joy and terror—a dreadful emotion of triumph over life and destiny, suffering and despair—as she reeled and sank backward on her bed, "can this be welcome death that is coming—on me—at—last?"

And she became totally insensible.

In a moment Adderfang was by her side; then he paused for a space, and muttered with a shudder:

"Ugh! in that dress, too! What fiend made the hag, my mother, give it to her! How like that other one she looks—the Vierlander girl; but why that thought to-night?"

He cut open her bodice to permit her to breathe more freely, threw the coverlet over her, and with a singular glance in his dark eyes, as he surveyed her pale and helpless beauty, turned away, muttering:

"To-night shall see the end of all this!"

He locked the door, and put the key in his pocket.

"Why not now?" said he as he paused in the corridor, and turned with wolfish eyes towards the room he had left; but a dreadful row made between Rachel Adderfang and Peter the Great, with whom she had interfered while besieging

Narva, drew him away for a time, and again he muttered, "To-night—yes, to-night, ere twelve, it shall be done."

## CHAPTER LX.

THE Hamburg police had totally failed in tracing out the hiding-place of Van Neukerque. They had discovered, however, that no person answering to his description had quitted the city by railway in any direction ; consequently, they naturally concluded that, unless he had gone away by some of the Elbe steamers, he must be somewhere in the city, or Altona.

Several days were passed in the deepest anxiety by me. The gendarmes kept a special eye on Dr. Moses Adderfang, and he was often traced as far as Altona ; but having possession of his five hundred dollars, they were not very strict in following him farther. Then for some days I was deprived of the useful advice and assistance of Major von Gordon, who had gone on military duty ; but so soon as he returned we meant to resume our inquiries of the chief of the police.

The latter naturally enough suspected that no assassination had taken place up to the time of the mock interment being discovered ; but it was impossible to say what might have taken place since, as a dire necessity to the perpetrators of the mystery, or to where the lady who was their victim had been spirited away and concealed, or for what purpose they had done so.

The Hamburg newspapers were full of the affair, and the showy and beautiful Countess of Klampenborg was so piqued and mortified by the new and awkward publicity given to her name, and her alleged complicity with the impostor, Van Neukerque, *alias* Baron Elandberg, that she hastily quitted the city and retired to Hanover, where—the *Correspondent* went the length of affirming—Van Neukerque had gone also in the attire and capacity of her courier, as that gorgeous official had been dismissed just before her departure, and for no particular reason.

The image of Clarice Haywood filled all my mind now, and



I pictured her under every phase of sorrow, distress, and suffering.

"Where will all this end?" said I to Graves, as we loitered one evening about dusk under the portico of the Hôtel de l'Europe, "and when will it end?"

"Who is to say, by Jove?" responded Percival, who was never overburdened with ideas at any time.

"The past has gone into eternity; I can only think about the future; yet her future will never be linked with mine. I could neither marry nor unmarry her; but by heavens I can at least avenge her!"

Graves was not sentimental, but he grasped my hand, and said:

"All right, old fellow. I'll stand by you like a brick!" and then he added, with something of relief or satisfaction in his tone, "Here comes Von Gordon at last."

"Welcome, major, from Cuxhaven!" I exclaimed.

"Thank you, mein herr. I have just arrived by the Norwegian mail steamer," replied the major, as he placed two fingers of the left hand to his Prussian helmet, while he presented the right to us ungloved. "Any news of the lost one—any light thrown on our mystery yet?—for ours I may term it."

"None," said I, sighing.

"It is positively marvellous."

"It is agony to me."

Darkness had now set completely in; the gas-lamps were lighted everywhere, and after a bumper or two of claret in the hotel, we set forth for a ramble round the pleasant Rathhaus market and the gardens that lie between it and the stately Bourse—the largest, perhaps, in the world.

I could little foresee where my promenade that night was to end.

Lured by the lights, the bustle, the display of goods, plate, dress, pictures, and so forth in the beautiful shops of the Alster Arcade, we loitered under the arched piazza for a time, till a crowd and a row—a "wiegular wow," Graves called it—in front

of the Alster Pavilion attracted our attention, and we speedily saw the Prussian gendarmes, with their blue tunics, black belts, and brass-hilted hangers, busy in the matter.

A foreigner—a seaman, we were informed—had imbibed a considerable quantity of lager beer, without having money to pay for it, and he noisily asserted to the waiters, but vainly, that he had been robbed by a girl while seated at one of the tables which stand there in rows between the pavilion and the pavement of the Jungfernstieg.

The man was vociferating alternately in pure Spanish and execrable German, protesting loudly against his being taken into custody.

His face, somehow, seemed familiar to me. Where had I seen it before? A black-bearded fellow, forbidding in aspect, with rings in his ears—rather like a seaman, too, and very much like a pirate.

In a moment the recollection flashed upon me.

He was Fabrique Balarino, the carcelero who had me so unpleasantly in his keeping at Puerto Rico, after the row in the theatre there. Positions were changed with us now, and for the sake of a few copper schellings I was not disposed to let the poor foreigner undergo the misery of a night at least in a Hamburg police cell, and so, greatly to his astonishment and relief, I paid the money for him, and the crowd dispersed at once.

The man had been tipsy, for he had been mixing his beer with corn brandy; but the affair had sobered him, and when I spoke in Spanish, the sound of his native language seemed to stir some secret and better chord in his heart, and he said, with a broken voice—

“Lo estimo, señor, soy su servidor” (“I am obliged to you, sir, and am your servant”).

“Fabrique, hombre mio, how long is it since you left San Juan de Puerto Rico?” I inquired, and then the dark features lighted up with surprise.

“Have you, señor, ever been in Puerto Rico?”

“Yes.”

"When, *senor mio*?"

"A year ago. I once had the misfortune to be in your care, too, in that filthy carcel. Don't you remember the English gentleman whom Don Ramon de la Puente, of the Spanish artillery, befriended—the prisoner who was accused of assaulting the *alcalde*?"

He scratched his beard for a time, and then said that he remembered me perfectly.

"Si, *senor*. I hope I was kind to you," he added.

"I can remember that you were pretty indifferent as to what I thought or felt, and I can remember your odious messes of beans and coffee."

He laughed, and said—

"El *senor Inglese* must not forget that I was then a *carcelero*. Before that I had been a seaman on board of a coolie crimp, where one does not gain much softness of heart. I wearied of being a *carcelero*, and having given a quadroon a slash with my knife in a brawl, I found the *alcalde* most desirous to have a personal interview with me—the same *alcalde* whom you, *senor*, knocked down in the theatre—so I shipped as cook on board of a vessel bound for Hamburg, and here I am."

Major Gordon laughed outright at the coolness with which the Spanish West Indian spoke of using his knife—referring, for all that we knew, to an actual assassination.

"Was the quadroon killed?" he asked.

"Oh, no, *senor*."

"That was well," said the major.

"Ah, but he died next day."

"Egad, but this fellow is amusing from his perfect *sang froid*," said Graves.

"Well," said I, "avoid more scrapes, *amigomio*, and get on board your ship at once. Where is she lying? In the Elbe, of course?"

"*Senor*, I have no ship—"

"Out of funds, I suppose?"

"No, *senor*."

"What, then?"

"I have betaken me to the trade of carcelero again."

"Here in Hamburg?" asked I.

"No."

"Where, then?" asked Gordon impatiently.

"At Rolandsburg."

"Rolandsburg?" said Gordon, pondering. "There is no prison of that name, either here or in Altona, that I can think of."

"But it is not quite a prison, senores."

"How! Explain."

"A little private madhouse, kept by a strange fellow—a dog of a Jew—and his mother."

"How is he named?" asked the major suspiciously.

"Dr. Moses Adderfang."

"The same fellow who has a house in the Stubbeneuk?" I exclaimed, as we all became deeply interested, and ordered more lager beer, which we drank standing at one of the external tables, as an officer in uniform like Gordon would not seat himself in the company of a man such as Balarino.

"I know not where he has a house, senor; but this I know—that he is most of the day absent, and comes to his patients only at night—or, at least, has done so latterly. Old Mother Adderfang keeps them in order by day with her whip."

"Moses Adderfang, the quack and conjuror, the proprietor of a private lunatic establishment! A light breaks in upon me," exclaimed the major.

I was trembling with the new suspicion that seized me, when Gordon asked:

"How many patients has this Herr Adderfang?"

"Only four or five."

"Take your beer. Who are they?"

"Thanks, senor. One old fellow imagines himself Count of Holstein, another the Emperor of Russia," said Balarino, laughing, "and, santos! but they are both mad enough for anything."

"Any more?" said I.

"Yes," said Balarino, with a villanous wink; "he has a

pretty woman there, who is no more mad than I am. I begin to be fond of her too ; but she is so infernally proud, and old Adderfang wants to keep her for himself."

"What is her name?" I asked, making a violent effort to seem calm.

"I do not know, senor ; but she wears a wedding ring."

"Describe her."

"She is pale, senor, with light brown hair, and eyes of a soft hazel, with black lashes, and small features. She was long ill, and once or twice I thought she was about to die."

"Is she English?" I asked.

"Yes, senor."

"From whence was she brought?" demanded Gordon.

"To assist in bringing her to Rolandsburg was my first employment."

"Well, well, go on," said I.

"You see, senores, I had been paid off in the Elbe, and soon lost my few dollars about the Stubbeneuk. One night, when, without a penny in my pocket, I was loitering about the bank of the outer Alster lake, a man came alongside the jetty in a boat—a man whom I afterwards knew to be Moses Adderfang—and he asked me if I could handle an oar.

"‘To be sure,’ said I, ‘for I am a marinero.’"

"‘A foreigner—a stranger?’ said he.

"‘Yes, I am both.’"

"‘All the better. Come on board. Help me to pull this boat up the river, and you shall have ten double marks. Here are two to begin with.’"

"To a starving man the offer was tempting. We pulled up the Alster for several miles before I discovered that we had an empty coffin in the bottom of the boat."

"A coffin !" we exclaimed.

"Si, senores. I didn't like the look of it much, and you see—— But I may be getting myself into some scrape now by telling of it, as I thought I was in a scrape then."

"No, no—go on," said I, "and you shall have a hundred dollars when your story is told."

"I have not much more to tell. The coffin was taken into a house by a back window that opened towards the river. A lady was brought out by the same window—in a fit, as I thought, for the poor thing lay as one that was dead, while we pulled across the stream to where a droschki stood ; we drove with her to Rolandsburg, and there Moses Adderfang, on finding that I was indeed a perfect stranger, and almost ignorant of his language, took me into his service."

We had now got possession of a witness whom we should not permit to escape us. I handed him a roll of crisp dollar notes, and said :

"When did this occur?"

"On the twenty-fifth of last May, I think."

"The very date carved on the mock tombstone. And the place?"

"Was called Ependorf, as I learned since."

"A village on the Alster?"

"Si, senor."

Every link was complete now in Neukerque's chain of villany, and our excitement was great on hearing all this.

"Do you know, fellow," said the major, "that a great reward is offered for information regarding this lady?"

"No senor, I did not," replied Balarino, looking somewhat alarmed.

"We have not a moment to lose in applying to the Prussian authorities at Altona," said Von Gordon.

"But we may not find them immediately, and before offices are opened at this hour and warrants got I shall go mad with impatience. Fabriqua Balarino, if you will guide us to this place, Rolandsburg, and give us admittance in your official capacity of keeper, turnkey, carcelero, or whatever the deuce you call yourself, I promise you in presence of these gentlemen one hundred more rix-dollars."

"A hundred more rix-dollars! *Par todos santos!* I would set the place on fire for half the sum. Gentlemen, command me ; I am yours."

We had our revolvers, for in the streets of a dissipated city

like Hamburg we seldom went abroad without them. A droschki was summoned, the four of us stepped in, and the driver was urged and paid to use his utmost speed in taking us to Rolandsburg on the Kiel road.

"It is nearly two leagues," said Balarino.

"Good. In less than an hour we shall be there," said Von Gordon, looking at his watch.

I sat silent, overpowered by my own thoughts. They were indeed now beyond what could be committed to paper.

## CHAPTER LXI.

HAMBURG, with its pleasure-loving thousands, its lines of brilliant lamps, and dark, muddy canals, its bridges and jingling 'busses, its tea-gardens and stately hotels, was soon left behind. The patrols of gendarmes, the Prussians relieving posts, and always marching with bayonets fixed and camp-kettle slung over their hairy packs, the pretty Verlander flower-girls, with their great straw hats and double queues of hair, had all disappeared, and we were traversing the flat and open country, between rows of tall poplars and pollard willows, under a clear starlight, for there was no moon, and all the landscape seemed dark and dreary.

Nothing caught the eye save an occasional windmill, like a tall giant whirling his arms about in the distance.

None of us spoke.

Opposite me was Von Gordon, and as an occasional light from a wayside window flashed into the droschki I could see his silver epaulettes and spike helmet, his gray moustaches and grave face—Scottish rather than German still, nathless the mixture of two generations of Brandenburges in his blood—as he sat with his hands crossed on the hilt of his long slender regulation rapier, with which he led the 75th in the war of Schleswig Holstein.

At last, even wayside cottages disappeared, and we could see the light of the stars reflected in many a tarn and marshy pool; but no sound broke the stillness save the whistle of an occasional train on its way to Lubeck or to Kiel.

"We draw near the place," said Balarino, on which I gave a convulsive start.

"I like your impetuosity, mein herr," said Gordon, "so I shall stand by you in this affair, though the general at Altona may ask why one of his officers became mixed up in it."

"But it has made such a noise already," I urged.

"And the fellow is only a Jew," added Percival Graves.

"And a Hamburger to boot," was the addendum of the major, who, like most of the Prussian officers, liked to trample on the traditionary liberties of the Free City of which his country had taken military possession.

"This, senores, is Rolandsburg," said Balarino, as we came to a gate, or rather an opening in a hedgerow, for the gate itself had long since fallen from its hinges, and lay shattered by the side of the path.

The country seemed open and desolate, flat and dreary; but about three hundred yards along the pathway I perceived a dark mass standing against the sky—a mansion of some kind, from amid the dark front of which a single ray of light was shining.

"And she is there," thought I, while I could hear the painful beating of my heart.

"What if we should find Van Neukerque here, and the fellow should resent our taking his wife from him?" suggested Von Gordon.

"By Jove! I never thought of that," said Graves.

"I am prepared for any emergency, even to shooting him down like a weasel," said I, placing a hand on my revolver.

I slipped a dollar as a "tip" into the hand of the droschki driver, and told him to await our return, and I knew that, as we had his number, the presence of Gordon in uniform would insure his doing so.

Our object or plan was simply to get into the house at all hazards, by force or persuasion, and carry off the captive.

"Let us approach gently and without noise," said Fabriquæ Balarino, "for though I have no fear of Adderfang, the old hag his mother is capable of anything."



"And to wretches such as these has poor Clarice been committed!" was my thought.

And now, on drawing nearer, I could see the details of the half-ruinous edifice, with its three angular turrets and shattered round tower, the loopholes of which were filled up by loose bricks or straw. The windows of the lower floor were heavily grated with iron, and being partially covered up or filled in by pieces of boarding, rags, and so forth, the whole place, as seen by the starlight, had a desolate, sordid, and mean appearance.

"That is the room of the lady you seek," said Fabriqua, pointing to a particular window.

"It is quite dark!" I exclaimed.

"Do you think that even if she were dying—and sometimes she has looked very like it—that Rachel Adderfang would indulge her with a light?"

"Stay! There is a light in it now."

"At this hour?"

"Yes—look," said I, as a gleam suddenly shot athwart the window, towards which I hastened, descending into the grassy hollow of the old fosse, and springing up the other side.

There I found that I could look in with ease, grasping the while the iron grating, which shook in the brick wall, so old and ruinous was the place.

I could see a large, bare, and almost empty room, the floor, as I have said, uncarpeted, a single chair, a table, and little more forming its furniture. In a dark corner stood a curtainless bed, and at the half-opened door a man was standing, as if irresolutely, bearing a lamp, the rays of which he shaded with one hand as he peered stealthily around him, and in his hooked nose, quick cunning eyes, coarse sensual lips, and large flabby cheek, I recognised Moses Adderfang.

Entering, he closed the door, and placed the lamp on the table, and then I could perceive that on the couch there lay the form of a female, clad like a Verlander peasant girl, to all appearance in a profound slumber.

Adderfang paused again, took up the light, and passed it

twice across her face. It was pale and wasted, the lips were apart, but not like those of an ordinary sleeper, for the lower jaw seemed strangely relaxed.

Was this woman dead, there seemed so little sign of respiration?

He twice lifted a hand and let it drop again. By this action he removed a coverlet that partly lay over her, and a kind of fierce groan escaped me as I recognised at once—Clarice!

I was aware that I was now alone, as already Balarino, Graves, and the major had gone round to the entrance; but revolver in hand, I was absorbed in watching the scene before me.

He bent over her. Was the wretch about to kiss her, or what? No, he felt her pulse, and passed his hand over her face; yet she never stirred, and the conviction that she was dead—delivered from all her sorrows at last—came bitterly into my soul.

"Women are capricious in their tastes," I heard him mutter. "How do I know but she may have been preferring that Spanish fellow, Balarino, to me—to me, ha! ha! poor fool! Am I to feel jealous of my own underling?"

He was passing a hand under her neck, when he paused and started, looking round with a pale and stealthy glance in his wolfish eyes.

"What sound is that? Pah! the Kiel railway train."

But it was not the passing train. However, he knew not what it was.

Still Clarice never stirred or seemed to breathe.

Dead!

Ah, she could not be dead, else whence the storm of kisses this wretch now lavished on her passive face?

I shook the iron grating in my wrath, afraid to fire my pistol lest the bullet should strike her; but at this crisis a terrible crash made Adderfang pause and spring into the middle of the floor.

The grating of the window to which I clung was, as has been stated, old, worn, and rusty. The winter blasts of three

centuries had nearly eaten it though. I suddenly felt all the bars become very loose, and then the whole iron frame gave way, and I had to shrink aside as it went crashing into the grassy fosse, followed by a mass of dislodged bricks.

In another moment I was through the window, the decayed framework of which I dashed to pieces with one hand, while by the aid of the other I vaulted into the room with a strength and activity the result of my past life in Africa.

Adderfang, who had shrunk back appalled towards the door, believing the sudden assault on the room to be effected, perhaps, by one of his own infuriated patients, now recognised me, and an exclamation of fear, followed by one of rage, escaped him.

Snatching up the solitary chair, he rushed upon me with baffled malice, avarice, and fury in his heart and in his eyes, for well did he know that if I escaped with my life he was lost for ever.

Even then, by keeping the table between us, I could have shot him down, but such was not my purpose. He hurled the chair furiously at my head—I ducked—it was dashed to pieces against the opposite wall—and then I rushed upon him. In closing with Adderfang, I felt within me that emotion which some one has described as “the wild beast force whose home is in the sinews of a man.”

I seized him by the ribs with both hands, lifted him fairly off the floor, and dashed him head foremost against the wall with such force that he lay still, stunned, snorting, and immovable, with the blood gushing from his mouth and nostrils.

At that moment the door was flung open, and Major Gordon entered with his sword drawn, followed by Graves and Balarino, who was looking pale and bloody from a wound on the head, inflicted, as I was informed, by the fierce old Jewess, Rachel Adderfang, on their effecting an entrance by his aid—in fact, when she found the place was taken by a *coup de main*, as well as by stratagem.

The major took off his silk sash, and said to Balarino—

“Bind that scoundrel’s hands behind his back. I little

thought my sash would ever be degraded to such a use ; but we shall take him into Altona with us to-night."

Then Balarino tumbled Adderfang over on his face, and with seaman-like alacrity secured his elbows hard and fast behind him.

By this time, with a sudden transition from fierce fury to softness and the most tender commiseration, I was hanging over Clarice. How strange she looked in her pallor, and in that quaint Verlander costume, too, with its bodice all cut loose and open.

I raised her, but still she fell back as if lifeless on the pillow, yet she was warm and breathing.

"This sleep cannot be natural," said Graves, who had taken one of her hands between his own, and was kindly chafing it.

"Some fresh villany, some mystery, is concealed in it!" I exclaimed. "Balarino, hoist that piece of Jew carrion to his feet, and throw some water over him."

Balarino did so without much ceremony, and Adderfang opened his eyes, gasping heavily the while, and a terror came over him on seeing the point of Gordon's sword within an inch of his throat.

"Ach, Gott in himmel ! Would you kill me, herr major?" he moaned.

"With as little compunction as I would spit a rat," said Gordon sternly.

"Have mercy !"

"It one minute more I shall pass this blade through your body if you hatch a single lie. Answer us, Jew : what is the matter with this lady ? Has she fainted from terror, or what ?"

"It is but a slumber. I did but give her a soothing draught to ensure one for an hour or two, and came but to see how it operated. I did, indeed, mein herr, as I have heaven to answer to for it ; and this is my reward—this is my reward."

"Silence, dog and liar!" replied the officer, sheathing his sword, greatly to the relief of the human reptile it had menaced.

"Medical aid must be got at once," said I, with an emotion of anxiety that drew tears from me.

"We shall take her immediately with us to Altona. Wrap her carefully up, and convey her to the droschki—the night is cold and chilly," said the kind old major, as he gave me his large blue military cloak, which was lined with scarlet, and I rolled it round her.

Oh, how my heart beat with tenderness, compassion, and a great fear that she might yet die, as I raised her in my arms, and bore her from that pestilent den, while Graves and Balarino dragged Adderfang forth, amid the curses and reviling of his mother, and the yells, screams, and maniac laughter from the rooms or cells wherein Peter the Great was bellowing to his imaginary Muscovites, and the Count of Holstein was galloping on his broomstick.

Adderfang was secured by our handkerchiefs to the seat of the droschki beside the driver. Balarino, well content with his night's work, his pocket being well lined with rix-dollars, was left to follow us on foot, and with Clarice in my arms, her head pillowed on my shoulder, we drove to Altona, and drew up at the first station occupied by the Prussian gendarmes, to whom we made our report, and handed over our crestfallen prisoner.

On what slender threads may the whole destiny of a life turn.

Had we lingered in the smoking-room of the hotel that evening, instead of setting forth to walk, had we turned down any other street than the Alster Arcade, we had not met Balarino. Had his pocket not been picked, there had been no row, no interference on my part, and no recognition of him; his subsequent revelations we should never have heard, and our merciful interposition at Rolandsburg had never taken place.

I thought over all these things with a kind of wild terror in my heart—a terror that mingled with thankfulness to heaven, and the purest compassion for the poor and inanimate sleeper whose tender cheek was resting on my shoulder, and to whom consciousness was only beginning to return as we rattled through the gas-lighted streets of Altona.

## CHAPTER LXII.

THREE or four days after this, few would have recognised in the fashionably-dressed lady who was seated with me at the open window of a handsome room on the first *étage* of the stately Hôtel de l'Europe, watching the pleasure boats on the sunny Binnen Alster, the gay flags and spires of Altona rising above the lofty roofs of the Neuer Jungfernstieg, the poor wan and wasted being who had been rescued on that auspicious night from Rolandsburg.

I had brought her to our hotel, and there she had been most skilfully treated by a medical man of the first eminence in Hamburg—the same who related the story of the hidden wound on that day in the public cemetery—and she was now recovering fast in some respects, though, in fact, she scarcely seemed to wish it.

She was much too delicate in health yet to appear at the crowded *table d'hôte*. Moreover, she shrank from the curiosity her attendance there would excite. Her room adjoined the one occupied by Graves and me, and times there were in the night when I could hear through the thin wooden partition the sobs she tried to stifle under her bedclothes, and at times the pacing of her bare feet on the varnished floor. Keen then grew the longing in my heart to rush in and comfort her; but fate had raised between us an impassable barrier.

I strove to form plans for her future guidance and my own. Her monster spouse she must never see again. I would be to her, father, brother, or dear kinsman; I would place her with some family in Hamburg—perhaps in the house of our consul—till I could get her sent to her sister in the West Indies, and once more I would resume my own solitary wanderings. But these resolutions had another sequel, for “the best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley,” as Burns has it.

With Clarice, her torture of the mind was all I had to fear now.

I had her in my possession and under my care as completely as if she had been a sister. Not even Van Neukerque could take her from me now. Our position was strange and awkward, yet not without a melancholy charm.

Here was the woman I had loved—the girl who had hoped to be my bride in her sunny youth—rescued by me from a terrible fate, from a series of degrading calamities—cast entirely upon my hands in a foreign country. She had no protector, no friend save me, and she was the wife of another—a wretch who neither cared nor dared to claim her.

Circumstanced as we had been and were now, great tact and delicacy were necessary for my line of conduct, lest I should place her in a false position with a world at all times too ready to be censorious. Yet these were topics which it seemed impossible to avoid, simply because we felt forbidden to approach them.

We were much alone now, for Graves and the worthy Major von Gordon felt that perhaps we were better left so for a time, at least, as we had much to narrate and explain to each other.

She was pale and attenuated, but her skin was beautifully white and transparent, her rich brown hair was dressed to perfection, and a fashionable milliner in the Alster Arcade had done all the rest.

For a while I could see with pain that there was an expression of startled uncertainty in her eyes, as if she feared every one or knew not whom to trust; but after a time it passed away, especially when with me.

She was now gazing dreamily on the beautiful and brilliant scene which spread before the windows of that magnificent hotel, as if she could scarcely believe it all real, and her small hands in the prettiest of attitudes that small hands can assume, played with a splendid Roman fan I had just brought her.

“And I am here—actually here and with you,” she said, in a sweetly touching tone of voice, while gazing upward at me earnestly and trustfully with those clear hazel eyes, whose smile I had never forgotten; “here with you, Dick Haddon,” she added, laughing; but her laugh was a hollow and bitter one—painful to the heart and painful to the ear.

As I mutely pressed her hand in mine, I felt her wedding ring. Oh, fatal ring! It struck a chill to my heart, and with that chill a sense of anger and jealousy was mingled.

"Oh, Clarice," said I, "had we never met, then each had never known of the other's existence, and how much unhappiness had been spared us!"

"And I might have been still in Rolandsburg," said she, shuddering. "Oh, of how deep a scheme have I been the victim! I can now remember, dearest Dick, how the deep sleep fell upon me in Ulrik Rosing's cottage, and the terror of his wife, Gretchen. Then followed a delirious kind of dream, in which I had no power of utterance or volition—a dream of being carried through a window, placed in a boat, and rowed away, away into space, and then I can recall no more, till I awoke in that place where, months after, you found me."

"The window was that of Ulrik's cottage; the boat was Moses Adderfang's, and it floated on the Alster."

"Oh, what do I not owe you and Percival Graves, and that good Prussian major?" she exclaimed, looking up at me with eyes full of affection, as I bent over her chair.

"A little gratitude, Clarice—nothing more to me at least—only a little gratitude *now*."

"But I love you, Dick," she exclaimed in a piercing voice; "love you still, as I have ever done!"

"Do not say so," said I, in a broken voice, and in sore perplexity. "It is useless—worse than useless now."

"Do not misunderstand me," she replied, as a scarlet flush crossed her face, to leave her paler than before. "I love you Dick—dear, dear Dick, with that depth of passion known only to those whose days are numbered, even as mine are."

"Dearest Clarice, all our days are numbered."

"Yes—but I feel that mine are few, oh, so few, and that from this world I am quickly passing away—so the avowal brings no shame to me." She pressed her hand upon her heart as she spoke, for she really believed herself to be dying, and added:

"Kiss me once again as of old, Dick, and say you forgive me—forgive your poor lost Clarice!"

Then I pressed my lips to hers in a tremulous and passionate kiss, with which our tears mingled.



All this was wrong—perilous too, perhaps, and I should at once have made other arrangements ; but she was so helpless and sorrow-stricken that her tears were a source of great pain to me, and I said :

“ My lost love, can it be that you are so devotedly mine as of old ? ”

“ Oh, yes, yes ! ”

“ And yet the wife of—that man ? Oh, Clarice, it is a coil of horror ! No woman was ever loved twice in her lifetime as you have been loved by me ; yet this is the end of it. Think how you blamed Fanny for her treatment of poor Gerard Douglas— ”

“ But I thought you dead, and then—then you don’t know all I underwent,” she faltered, amid a torrent of tears which I strove in vain to soothe, while her shoulders shook convulsively, and I could see that when speaking how nervously she fingered her wedding ring, even seeking to conceal it from me.

“ I do not mean to upbraid you,” said I putting an arm tenderly round her ; “ but how came you ever to think of that man as—as— ”

“ A lover, you would say.”

“ Yes ; and as a husband.”

“ Did not Fanny tell you all at Datetree Pen ? Alas, alas ! it began by great gratitude and a little admiration. It was fate and habit.”

“ What do you mean by habit, Clarice ? ”

“ My poor heart was empty ; I was almost alone in the world. Fanny had her husband to love and protect her, but whom had I ? And there were kindness, association, and propinquity by sea and in a foreign land. Even Fanny urged that in my loneliness I should not morbidly treasure a mere memory. And so it came to pass,” she added, sobbing, “ We are all of us very perfect creatures till we are tried, Dick, and I was sorely tried ; but pardon me, darling—say you do ! ”

“ Most terrible has been the expiation,” said I, pressing my

lips to her hot, flushed forehead ; but weeping and talking evidently relieved her, so she resumed :

"I know that I ought not to have married him while loving another—for I loved you even in death, as I deemed, and wore mourning for you as your widow ; but I was weak, ill—half insane, I think—and Fanny and Douglas urged me to accept him. I felt, somehow, that I could not help myself, for I was a poor and dependent creature when first we met—indeed I could not," and she clasped her poor little hands tightly together as she added, "And oh, Dick, Dick, if you did but know the horror of living with a man one does not love, and never can love, and of whose mysterious bearing and violent conduct I was ever in fear, you would pity me."

"I do pity you, Clarice ; but you must have some pity and compassion for me—I, who loved the ground you trod on. Never did man love woman more."

"All avail us nothing ! My life is a lost one, and luckily for all concerned will not last long now ; but while it does last we shall be dear friends, Dick, as we can be nothing more." And again the sad, bitter smile stole over her pale face. "What has been done cannot be undone, Dick, and now I am like her who is mentioned in the prophecy of Vanda, 'a widowed wife, a wedded maid.'"

"Clarice," said I, taking her hands in mine, "married though you were to that man, there was a link between you and me too strong to break, a tie too tender for the world to see or know, and though so much time has elapsed since last we met and spoke, the link and tie of heart to heart were there still. Darling, did you not feel all this?"

She bent her face over my hands, and kissed them ere I could prevent her. Then, as if to change the subject, she looked up and asked—

"Tell me, Dick, am I much changed?"

"In appearance?"

"Yes."

"A very little ; but that little will soon pass away."

"Too soon—I feel it here in my heart."

"But you have the same beautiful and loving eyes," said I, determined to ignore her meaning, "with their soft expression and wonderful lids."

"Is this flirtation or flattery?" she asked gravely.

"Could it be either, darling, with that ring on your finger, and when we have the terrible past to look back upon, and before us—what?—a hopeless and blighted future?"

"Pardon me for that, Dick—pardon me."

"You are a woman, Clarice, for a man to love once and for ever, and for yourself alone."

How much more of this sort of thing—this painful and half-strangled love-making, for such it was fast becoming—might have gone on, I know not; but at that moment, fortunately, perhaps, a knock rang on the door, and a waiter entered to say that "Major von Gordon and Herr Graf," as they persisted in calling Graves, "were below, and wished to see me in haste."

"Excuse me, dearest Clarice—a little time, and I shall be with you again."

And kissing her hands, I left her.

With her slender, wan, white fingers interlaced, her pale cheeks paler still, in anticipation of some fresh calamity, her eyes turned to the closed door with a gaze full of anguish, sorrow, lone and utter despair, Clarice, it would seem, remained for a time like a statue after I left the room.

## CHAPTER LXIII.

THE faces of the major and Percival Graves were full of importance—they were quite radiant, in fact, with excitement.

After politely inquiring for the health of Clarice—

"What a jolly row we've been engaged in this morning," said Graves.

"A row?"

"Yes, Haddon, by Jove! No end of a row, indeed!"

"We have to congratulate the lady on a happy release," said Von Gordon.

"From what, or whom, now?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Moses Adderfang?"

"Bah! A husband," replied Gordon, stroking his grizzly, gray moustache.

"He—he—has he committed suicide?"

"Not at all; he was too great a coward for that," replied Gordon.

"Yet he died hard," added Graves. "It was a most painful scene."

"Dead! Is Van Neukerque dead?" I asked, in a breathless voice.

"Yes, shot by a bullet through his heart," replied Gordon.

"Or where that organ was supposed to be, major," added Graves.

"When did this happen?"

"Within this hour."

"And where?"

"At the nearest military post, in the Admiralitatstrasse."

"How shall I break the news to his widow?"

"Gently, of course; though I don't think the shock will kill her, with all her gentleness," said Gordon dryly.

"Tell me how this came about, herr major—or you, Graves."

In truth, the story they had to tell was rather a stirring one.

During the last four days the Prussian gendarmes had not been idle. They had cleared out Rolandsburg, where five miserable captives had been found in detention. Four of these were imbeciles, but the fifth was perfectly sane, and had been secluded there for nearly a year. Her discovery—for the captive was a woman—involved the arrest of the other guilty conspirators. The imbeciles were properly disposed of by the authorities.

The aged virago, Rachel Adderfang, had been carried in a frenzy of fury to the Great Krankenhaus, in the suburb of St. George, and the two degraded women, her servants or accomplices, had been sent to prison, with Moses, the chief culprit, while Balarino was detained as a witness. As for Adderfang. I need recur to him no more, save to say that from

the prison, after trial, he was transferred for life to a Prussian fortress, where probably he still solaces his leisure hours by breaking stones for the highways or polishing cold shot for the batteries.

In the first gust of his rage and fear, he had divulged that the long sought for Schencke van Neukerque was concealed in his house near the Stubbeneuk. It was promptly surrounded, and there the culprit had been found in one of the half-empty and comfortless apartments of that old and dilapidated mansion, from whence he was conveyed by the gendarmes to the nearest military post, there to be kept till the charges of fraud, cruelty, and conspiracy were made out against him, and until the syndic of the district decided further on the matter.

There, in charge of a lieutenant's guard of the 75th infantry, he had passed a night, sullenly defiant in tone and manner.

On the morning after his capture, a corporal of the guard, Friedrich Rosing—a younger brother of the miller at Ependorf—entered the cell in which he was confined with a breakfast for him of the same kind that was furnished for the soldiers from the nearest cheap restaurant.

The cell in which Van Neukerque had been placed was somewhat remote from all the others attached to the guard-house, and was situated at the end of a long corridor.

Animated by despair and fury on the discovery of his true character, and the total failure of all his schemes for wealth and position, he was yet resolved to make a desperate attempt at liberty, though his keepers were well armed, and were twenty to one against him.

Snatching up the heavy stoneware jug in which the coffee was brought him by the unsuspecting corporal, he dealt the latter a dreadful blow on the head with it, cutting completely through his tough leather helmet.

Stunned by the stroke, the corporal sank on the floor without a groan.

Escape from the cell was easy enough now, but only so far

as the corridor on which it opened, for at the end of the passage, at the door without, and under the verandah in the street, were double sentinels, with their needle-guns loaded.

Van Neukerque ground his teeth with rage, so, instead of rashly sallying forth, he took another and very strange resolution.

He dragged the insensible corporal into a corner of the cell and there secured his arms behind his back by his own waistbelt. He then barricaded the door on the inside by means of a billet, or short beam of timber, that had lain in the corridor outside.

He next proceeded to arm himself with Corporal Rosing's bayonet, and when that unfortunate fellow, whose face was deluged with blood, came to his senses, Van Neukerque threatened him with instant death unless released by the lieutenant in command of the guard.

The cries of the corporal on finding himself menaced by his own bayonet in the hands of one he deemed a madman on one hand, and the fierce, growling threats of Van Neukerque on the other, soon roused the attention of the officer, who brought Major von Gordon to the spot, as it chanced that the major, as field officer for the day, was visiting the post, accompanied by Graves, who had nothing else to do.

"Beware, meine herren!" cried the prisoner. "Beware of attempting to open the door, for so sure as I am heard in heaven and menaced by hell," he added, with many a dreadful oath, "I shall kill this man!"

Then, on peeping through an eylet hole in the massive door, the major could see that the sharp point of the bayonet was held within two inches of Corporal Rosing's breast, which was covered with the medals of honourable military service in the recent Prussian wars.

He could also see that the unusually pale face of Von Neukerque was ghastly with wild emotion, and that his eyes were blazing in their sockets with passion and fury.

"We will take you in the flank, my fine fellow," said Gordon.

A bench was placed against the external wall, and on this the two soldiers leaped with their rifles, for the purpose of shooting at him through the little window of the cell ; but in his grasp he held between himself and the orifice the person of the corporal as a shield, so that it was impossible to kill one without killing the other.

Twenty times the soldiers, conjointly or severally, levelled their cocked rifles, and as often withdrew their aim, and each time they did so the groans of the bleeding corporal were heard, mingled with the mocking laughter of the prisoner.

So the day wore on, and a vast crowd assembled, attracted by the strangeness of the affair ; and Van Neukerque, to show he was in earnest, further exasperated the soldiers by giving the helpless corporal a severe wound with the bayonet, in the mere wantonness of cruelty or rage.

"Listen to me, fellow," said Major von Gordon, "or I shall have the door battered down, and then you will be bayoneted without mercy."

"Say on, herr major."

"On what terms will you submit, and release that unfortunate man?"

"Very simple terms, herr major."

"Name them at once!"

"A brace of pistols loaded by myself, a hundred rix-dollars in money, and to be conveyed from this to the first steamer bound for England."

"Absurd ! You are mad ! Such terms, even had I the power to grant them, which I have not, are totally inadmissible," replied Gordon, astonished by the man's effrontery.

Then again Van Neukerque swore his terrible oath that he would kill the corporal, who was already sinking fast from loss of blood, if he was not himself slain.

About one o'clock in the day one of the soldiers on the bench without got a shot at him, as the head of the corporal, whom he propped before him as a human buckler, sank upon his shoulder ; but Van Neukerque "ducked," and escaped

the bullet, which flattened out like a large silver star, and dropped harmlessly on the pavement.

Sledgehammers were applied in vain to the door of the cell, which resounded under their blows like a vast drum. The barrier was narrow, and composed of massive iron plates, with a small aperture for ventilation ; and as it opened inwards, the billet, or beam of wood extending between it and the opposite wall, secured it from all attempts at being forced.

The entire day passed ; darkness was setting in, and the groans of the corporal had ceased, though Van Neukerque kept pricking him now and then with the bayonet, to ascertain by the quivering of his limbs if he yet lived.

The sentinels had been changed as usual, the crowd still lingered in the adjacent street, and determined to see the end of the affair. Major Gordon slept at the guard-house till dawn, when he was informed that the prisoner, who complained bitterly of intense thirst, had offered to give up the corporal in exchange for a vessel filled with water, to be placed before the door, which he consented to open provided Van Gordon would give his word of honour that the corridor should be cleared, and that not a shot should be fired at him through the window.

Glad to save the life of the corporal, the major gave the required promises. The soldiers placed a vessel filled with water immediately outside the door, and withdrew from the passage.

Slowly and stealthily the desperado removed the billet of wood, opened his door, took in the vessel of water, and tossed out the body of the corporal.

It fell with a strange sound on the paved floor, for the poor man was quite dead !

Van Neukerque then uttered a shout of defiance, reclosed the door, and secured it again by the billet of wood.

On finding that the corporal must have been dead some time, for already rigidity had set in, the justly exasperated major took a rifle from one of his soldiers, and levelling it through the window of the cell, said to the occupant :



"Villain, you have deceived me ! I gave you my word of honour for the release of a living man, and not of a dead one ; so thus receive the reward of your crimes !"

Cowering in a heap, with averted head and uplifted hands, the now thoroughly crushed Van Neukerque shrank into a corner. The rifle rang, the report filled the place with a sound like thunder ; an awful shriek followed, and when the smoke cleared away, Van Neukerque, who had bounded nearly to the ceiling, fell flat on his face shot through the heart.

So ended this tragedy, by which Clarice Haywood was freed from her tie to a man who had thus met the just reward of his crimes ; and I must own that the suddenness of the retribution filled me with considerable surprise and pleasure.

"Now, then, who is to break the intelligence to his widow?" said the major.

Clarice a widow—how strangely it seemed !

"Will you, herr captain?" he added.

"Thank you, major," said I ; "it will come better from your lips than mine."

"Well, then, Graves, so be it," said he ; while putting on my hat, I sallied forth into the crowded streets, to think over all I had heard, and the probabilities of the future to come.

## CHAPTER LXIV.

"PREPARE yourself, my dear madam, to hear something of vast importance," began the major, bowing low and holding his helmet by the spike.

"I am prepared for anything," replied Clarice. "What can happen to me now?"

"I am so glad that you possess—"

"Firmness, you would say, major?"

"Yes ; and I am glad to hear you call it so.

"Why?" said Clarice, somewhat amused by the major's prolixity.

"We men are so apt to stigmatise that quality in women as mere obstinacy."

"But your news, major? You forget what you men allege to be the dominant passion of my sex."

Gently though Von Gordon broke the news to her, concealing the while whose hand had fired the retributive shot, the whole episode had a terrible effect upon her. She had undergone so much that her health was delicate, and the shock proved rather severe for her sensitive nature.

When Von Gordon concluded, her hands went to her heart as if a pang had shot through it. She shook as if ill with jungle fever. To the major it seemed as if she had suddenly become huddled up on the sofa, a mere mass of shapeless blue silk and white lace, for she had fainted.

White she looked as snow, and cold as snow were her face and hands.

The worthy major was scared by all this, and rushed to the bell, which he rang with frantic violence. He could take the 75th Regiment into action coolly enough under fire from a brigade of 16-pounders; but a lady in a swoon terrified him.

After this event I was dubious what line of conduct to adopt, and whether or not I should leave Hamburg; but it seemed the more prudent and pleasant way to remove to another hotel, and absent myself for some days from the society of Clarice; and I had so much to do in reference to my own affairs that those days were fully occupied.

I had long letters to write to Douglas and to Fanny, who were still at Datetree Pen, to my Scotch agents, and to my bankers.

Graves and I arranged with Lauritz Balchen for the funeral of Van Neukerque, who by a strange chance or freak of destiny was buried in the very grave wherein he had deposited the coffin filled with stones and rubbish; but the monumental tombstone had been removed and broken by the order of the syndic.

Four days after this I visited Clarice; and from that time, as if by silent but tacit consent, the name of Van Neukerque was committed to oblivion by us both.

'Four days—four whole days—and you have not been to

see me," said Clarice, almost pouting, though she was sad and pale.

"I have had so much to do, Clarice, consequent on *our* own affairs," said I apologetically, while seating myself by her side, and taking her hand caressingly in mine.

"I am not ashamed to own that the time passes most wearily when I do not see you."

"Thanks for the dear admission, Clarice."

"You are the only true friend I have ; and heaven knows how I miss your endearing and graceful kindness, and how I missed it in that sad time—the past times of our separation—when I thought it would never delight me more."

"I should have been sooner here, Clarice ; but, consider, dear one, how you are situated, and that caution is necessary as much—nay, much more—for your sake than mine."

"I know that ; but ever with you in my heart and thoughts, there are times when I forget everything past and present in the desire to hear your voice and look into your eyes, Dick."

I pressed her hand to my lips.

"How can I thank you, Clarice, for such words as these ? But still we must dissemble for a time. Hence my reason for leaving the hotel. Consider how terribly a woman is left to bear the brunt of the world's bitter opinion, and the blame for loving one she should not be supposed to love, though we cannot always control our hearts."

"I am but a recent widow, true ; and the world is censorious even in Hamburg."

"But shall not such fears and prudence be things of the past with us, ere long, Clarice ? When I look on you as all my own again, when I hear your voice, see your eyes bent on mine, and have in mine your dear little hands, all my first, all my only, love returns, fuller in force—if indeed, it ever left my heart."

"I should not listen to all this yet, perhaps," said she, and paused as she glanced down at the black dress, with its deep crape flounce, too deep, perhaps, for the occasion—furnished for her by some fashionable milliner in the Alster Arcade, and

then looking at me with a divine smile, which conveyed a world of meaning—love, and trust, and gratitude.

On this I kissed again the hand that was one day to be mine.

During the few months that elapsed after this, and, indeed, while we remained in Hamburg, Clarice occupied rooms at the Europe, while Graves and I resided at the Kronprinzen ; but from the windows of our rooms we could still see each other, and blow kisses across the way, like the boy and girl lovers we were once. A widow now, she was at liberty to live where she chose, and the idea of residing with a private family was abandoned.

We lingered on in Hamburg pleasantly after this, having no object in view but to pass the time until we could make our final arrangements, and all these could be done with greater celerity and less remark than if we had been under the same peculiar circumstances at home in Britain.

Two nieces of Von Gordon, who came from Berlin—pleasant and accomplished girls—added to the happiness of our little circle, and we planned and carried out many a delightful trip along the banks of the Elbe into Holstein and Hanover, and sometimes by steamer as far as Cuxhaven, where the Hanoverian fleet, consisting of one ship, was wont to levy the state dues.

“Do I love you rationally, or passionately, or both?” said I, when sitting with Clarice in a handsome pleasure skiff, in which I had rowed her out into the Alster Lake, where we had floated lazily and drowsily under the gorgeous sunset of a March evening, when the spires of Hamburg were half hidden in golden haze, and Clarice, with her face wreathed in soft and happy smiles, was playing with the ripples in which her fingers dipped.

“How should I know, Dick, in what fashion you love me,” said she, colouring, as the wind blew aside her veil. “But whence this casuistry?”

“Because I often ask myself the question,” said I, pausing, with the sculls resting on my knees, and looking tenderly into her brown eyes ; “for the love of you has become a part of

myself, incorporated into my very existence. It has been said that no woman should ever let a man know the extent of her love for him, as men only presume upon the soft admission and become tyrants ; but I think, Clarice, you find me gentle and timid still."

"But we are not ordinary, or every-day lovers, Dick, and as you have loved me, and as you do love me, will you continue to do so as long as you live?"

"Can you doubt it?" I exclaimed.

"No."

And then she fell on my neck, with a kiss that ended in a sob.

"It is a terrible question when considered," she added; "but a ring is the emblem of eternity—without end."

"Well, darling, the sooner all this is over the better. I have made every preparation to quit Hamburg at an hour's notice—without beat of drum, as we used to say in the Fusiliers. And Clarice," I added, my voice sinking to a whisper, though there was not a human ear within a mile of us, "I love you so deeply and tenderly that I have a terror of tampering longer with fate, a vague dread of I know not what."

"Most true. We have undergone so much."

"Well," I resumed, while her little face lay nestled carelessly close in my neck, "this is the eighth—shall we say the sixteenth of this month?"

"The sixteenth !" said she, growing first red and then pale. "So be it, Dick."

"All right, darling ! Bless you for those words. To-night I shall see the herr pastor of St. Michael's about it."

That same evening the mail from Ostend brought us pleasant news from home.

Letters from my agents in Scotland, whither I had long since transmitted the confession of Mark Sharkeigh, informed me that there was now no occasion to produce such a doubtful document in court, though, singular to say, it tallied exactly with a similar revelation duly and legally signed and witnessed—a confession made by Mrs. Prudence Grubb—poured into

the startled ears of Messrs. Flewker of Church Walcot, and Benjamin Boreham of the Tabernacle. She divulged the whole plot on her deathbed, and acknowledged that her alleged bantling was the child of Sharkeigh's sister, a gipsy vagrant.

That night Graves, the major and I had a deep carouse as a libation on my good fortune, and seven days after that we all dined merrily together, and clinked our glasses for the last time with the old Scoto-Prussian major—now, I am happy to say, general-major—Helmuth von Gordon.

We were all to separate, for next day Graves was going to Paris, the 75th were to march to Berlin or Spandau, and I was to be married.

"Folks do sometimes take the wrong person, become widows and widowers, and then meet their old loves and get married, and end their days happily together after all," says the author of *John Halifax*, and so it was with us.

Many an event in my story has passed like a dream, and as a delicious dream passed that episode in the stately church of St. Michael at Hamburg, where my bride swept up the aisle on the arm of the Major von Gordon, who was clad in his complete uniform (blue and silver), the bridesmaids—his two nieces—in white behind them, the organ pealing softly under the fingers of the kapelmeister, while the reverend pastor, in the robe and ruff of the Lutheran Church, opened his mighty book at the gilded rail of the sanctuary, as I stepped forward from the side of Percival Graves, my groomsmen, to my place on the right hand of Clarice, who, in white lace, looked lovely—but what bride does not?

Then, as we knelt down a great hush seemed to fall upon all the curious observers around, whom our story had attracted and who filled the vast brick edifice—a hush that was broken only by the voices of the pastor and his clerk or the clang of the bells overhead, the ringers having been paid to be joyous on this occasion.

Among the admiring crowd were Ulrik and Gretchen

Rosing in their Sunday attire ; and there, too, were Lauritz Balchin and all the Rieten Diener, in their full but fantastic official costume, with sword and ruff, and cloak, for, as I have mentioned elsewhere, they superintended—if paid for—the happiest as well as the most melancholy scene of life.

The solemn words that bound us together till death should part us—that made us one before heaven—were spoken, the organ gushed forth a joyous anthem, and in fifteen minutes, more or less, all was signed and over, and our carriage, with closed blinds, was tearing through the streets of Hamburg.

“There are some families,” says a writer, “in whom an attachment to locality appears as strongly marked as in some animals, as there are others whose only pleasure seems to consist in constantly roving about the world.”

I had saved enough and to spare, and I must own to having what King James VI. called “a salmon-like instinct” to return home to Haddonrig ; and so now, as I write these closing lines, I can see from the window of my old paternal dwelling the sunset lingering on the peaks of the Cheviots, the blue Teviot winding past the woodland slopes of Roxburg to mingle with the Tweed, and pretty Kelso, with the towers of its stately abbey of the Blessed Virgin and St. John, glowing redly in the summer evening haze.

On the English side of those dear Cheviot Hills, Gerard Douglas, now a colonel on the retired list, resides within a pleasant ride of us, in old Walcot Tower, which he has rented on a long lease from the thriftless heir of entail, who has been making “ducks and drakes” of his property.

The present—in the time that waking dream of the future—which came over me on that most eventful evening in the garden of Von Bommel’s house far, far away, by the tributary of the Kieskamma River, when in fancy I saw Clarice Haywood enshrined in my home at Haddonrig, and heard the gladsome voices of our children mingling with the pleasant rustle of the old ancestral trees, and the murmur of the Te

viot, has been realized, for there at this moment are a hazel-eyed Clarice, a golden-haired Dick, and a chubby darling pet named Habbie, after old Uncle Halbert, playing happily amid the alternate shade and sunshine of the old oak avenue.

THE END.





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